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The New Lebanon Shaker Children's Order

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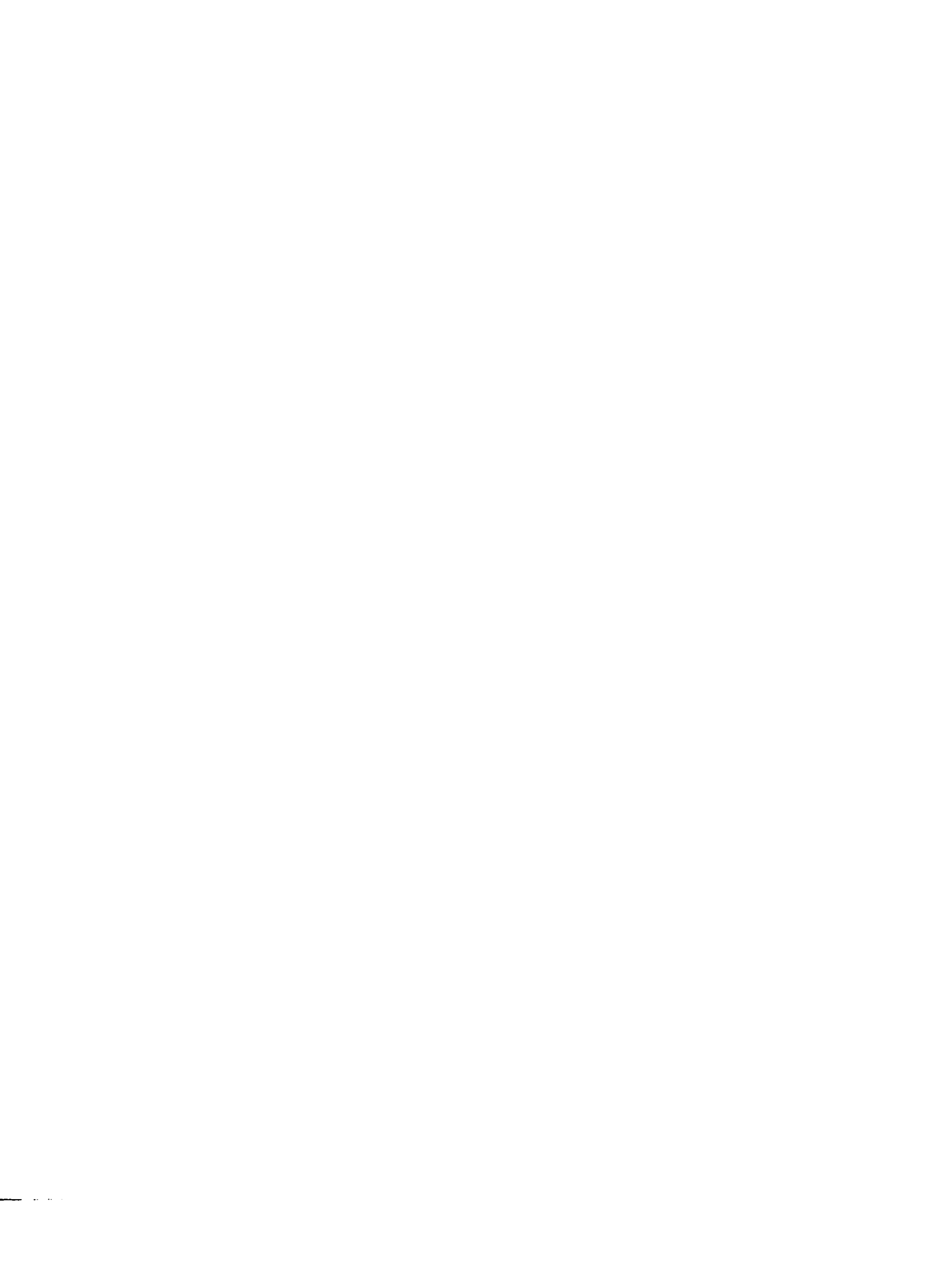
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The New Lebanon Shaker Children's Order

by

Judith A. Graham

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO. GATHERING INTO GOSPEL ORDER	37
CHAPTER THREE. GATHERING CHILDREN INTO THE SHAKER SOCIETY	93
CHAPTER FOUR. THE DAILY LIFE OF SHAKER CHILDREN	128
CHAPTER FIVE. EDUCATION OF SHAKER CHILDREN	161
CHAPTER SIX. CONCLUSION	204
APPENDIX	229
REFERENCES	233

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This introductory chapter sets the stage for presenting a study of the New Lebanon Shaker Children's Order. It begins with a brief overview of the foundation of Shakerism -- Ann Lee and her beliefs about men, women, perfection, and salvation -- and the religious culture of eighteenth century America into which they immigrated. Following this historical section are discussions of how the study was approached, the theoretical frameworks that inform the analysis, the objectives that organized the research, the methods and source criteria, the organization of the subsequent chapters, and what contributions this work makes to the larger body of historical family studies.

Ann Lee: Creating Shakerism

Ann Lee believed she was the female embodiment of God -- the second Christ incarnate. She preached a millennium, not of the future, not of an expectation of hope for tomorrow, but as a realization of today for all those who could accept the offer of God. The millennium was here, now. Every man, woman, and child had the potential of achieving perfection in this world, the world of the living and the present. The only obstacle standing between mankind and earthly perfection was sin. The path to perfection -- to being at one with the Holy Spirit -- lay in confession of all sins and the

forsaking of sin thereafter. This was the Shaker way of Ann Lee.¹

While many volumes and articles have been written on the furniture, arts, and order of the Shakers, based on what I know, only one article by Edward Deming Andrews has specifically addressed the Children's Order in the Shaker society.² The Children's Order was an outgrowth of the Shakers' attempts to promote spiritual union and temporal order by dissolving parent-child relationships. Believing that keeping children with their parents in the same Shaker "family" would distract the adults from fully concentrating on

¹[Rufus Bishop and Seth Y. Wells], eds., *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee, and the Elders with Her* (Hancock, MA: J. Tallcott & Deming, Jr., 1816). Rufus Bishop and Seth Youngs Wells are credited with beginning to collect these testimonies in about 1812 and compiling them into a private publication in 1816. The purpose of this volume was twofold: to preserve the details of the past with as much accuracy as possible and to help strengthen the faith and commitment of new members in the Shaker communities who had never known Mother Ann, Father William, and James Whittaker but upon whom the entire Shaker faith hinged. On page vi of *Testimonies*, Bishop and Wells state that this document is "written to prove, to all faithful Believers, that Christ did verily make his second appearance in *Ann Lee*: that she was the chosen witness to God to usher in a new dispensation of the gospel . . . and become the first spiritual Mother of all children of the resurrection . . ." This rare volume was used solely by the elders and was sometimes called "The secret book of the elders." E. Richard McKinstry, comp., *The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987), p. 12. According to Marini, *Testimonies* may have been designed as a companion volume to *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing* (the 1810 classic theology) or as a 25th year "commemoration" of Lee's death.

A second collection of testimonies, drawn from different sources, appeared in 1827; a revised 1816 edition was republished in 1888 (pp. 49-50). Stein states that "the principle historical value of the sayings in the *Testimonies* is that they underscore the norms, values, and practices prevailing in Shaker society at the time the oral traditions were collected" (pp. 28-29); see also pp. 76-87. For a discussion on the three distinct narratives in *Testimonies* and their value for understanding the role and imagery of Ann Lee, see Jean M. Humez, "'Ye Are My Epistles': The Construction of Ann Lee Imagery in Early Shaker Sacred Literature," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 8 (Spring 1992), pp. 83-103. See also Thomas Swain, "The Evolving Expressions of the Religious and Theological Expressions of a Community: A Comparative Study of the Shaker *Testimonies* Concerning the Sayings of Mother Ann Lee; An Exploration of the Development from Oral Traditions to Written Forms as Preserved in Four Documents," *The Shaker Quarterly* 12, 1 & 2 (Spring & Summer 1972), pp. 3-31, 43-67.

²Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, "The Shaker Children's Order," *Winterthur Portfolio* 8 (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1973). This descriptive article is a mildly sympathetic, but adequately objective, narrative about the Children's Order primarily during the 1820s and 1830s. Inadequacies and shortcomings of the Order are not discussed.

their spiritual progress led the Lead Ministry (the central governing body) to form a separate -- and separated -- order for youth under the age of sixteen. Caretakers instead of parents were entrusted with the children's welfare. The Children's Order itself, as modeled in the larger society, was segregated by gender; boys and girls remained apart from each other in all activities, including school, and apart from the adults.

Children were trained and educated by the society because of their potential spiritual and economic contributions to the sect as adult converts. From reviewing many Shaker diaries of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this research found that most youth came to the society with parent converts or as orphans. While these youth contributed to the labor force and made significant economic offerings, they were incorporated into the Shaker society primarily to perpetuate the ideals and religious tenets of Shakerism into the future. The middle decades of the nineteenth century brought a complexity to the Society that the first and second generation of leaders had not known; this, coupled with the beginning of the numerical decline in membership at mid-century seemed to mark a philosophical or attitudinal shift by the Society about the value of children. After the 1840s, youth seemingly were brought into the Society more to augment a declining membership and for their much needed labor to keep the society fed, clothed, and housed rather than for their spiritual value to the community.

The Shakers were a celibate adult society who invested time and energy in

children who would take up the Shaker cross and carry their name and cause forward.³

This study focuses on the Children's Order as a separate unit within the Shaker organizational hierarchy. To understand Shakerism and its impact on the American culture for over two hundred years, it is helpful, however, to begin with a present day review of the history of the Shaker organization.

American Evangelical Christianity

Eighteenth Century

Collectively, the Shakers were like most of their contemporaries: rural, New England farmers and craftsmen who espoused evangelical beliefs common to many of their neighbors and kin. They were millennialists -- "Evangelical radicals already withdrawn from secular society and traditional religion."⁴ America was, as Priscilla Brewer point outs, the anticipated site for this long awaited second appearance of Christ; the Shakers supported not a political revolution but a social one: "they set out to rebuild human relationships" by creating "a religious and social system within which men and women were equal, the natural environment was respected and not exploited, and service

³In contrast to the Shakers, both the Old Order Amish and the Quakers believed that only strong family affectional and economic bonds would ensure conversion of their children. For further discussion of family relationships in these two sects see Elmer W. Schweider and Dorothy Schweider, *A Peculiar People: Iowa's Old Order Amish* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1975); Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁴ Stephen J. Marini, "The New View of Mother Ann Lee and the Rise of American Shakerism," *The Shaker Quarterly* 18, 2 & 3, Summer and Fall, 1990, p. 58; Stephen J. Marini, *The Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

to God and to others was a daily priority."⁵

The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing,⁶ or Shakers, was founded on the fundamental principle that sin had "separated all souls from God, his favour [sic], and true happiness."⁷ Sexual intercourse, as first perpetrated by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, was the worst of all sins. This tenacious belief stemmed from a prophetic vision befalling Ann Lee in 1770 while she was imprisoned for her controversial religious beliefs, and established for all believers the individually encountered presence of Christ in each life. A believer is an experiencer -- a concrete expression of the attending reality of Christ living with and within each individual.⁸ Ann's ascendancy to leadership among a group of Quaker dissenters, called the Wardley Society, and the birth of Shakerism was marked by the Wardley members' acceptance of Ann's revelation and their corresponding experiences of the same phenomena. Beliefs in the individual experience of God, the possibility of perfection through the confession and forsaking of sin, equality of men and women, celibacy, and pacifism were the creeds of

⁵Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986), p. 203.

⁶The designations most commonly used are the Shakers or The United Society; also used: The United Society of Believer's in Christ's First and Second Appearing; The United Society of Believers; and The United Society of Alethians (briefly, in the late nineteenth century). The society was referred to metaphorically as the Millennial Church and the Virgin Church. Robert Edward Whitson, *The Shakers: Two Centuries of Spiritual Reflection* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1983).

⁷Thomas Brown, *An Account of the People Called Shakers: Their Faith, Doctrines and Practices as Exemplified in the Life, Conversation and Experience of the Author During the Time He Belonged to the Society* (Troy, NY: Parker and Bliss, 1812), p. 16.

⁸Whitson, *Two Centuries*, p. 13.

the Shaker way.

Four years after this revelation and Ann's assumption of leadership, she brought a meager band of seven followers to the American colonies, striving to escape persecution in England and to establish a divinely promised utopia of Believers. They came in 1774, on the eve of the American Revolution, to a region experiencing vast political and personal upheaval.

Settlement of the American colonies had been a partial result of the Puritan Awakening in England (1610-1640); the First Great Awakening had been a factor in the transition from English colonies to a separate union of states.⁹ This mid-eighteenth century revival had temporarily renewed Puritan pietism, but by the third quarter of the century this vitality had once again waned.

The religious fervor of the 1740s redefined man's relationship to God, focusing primarily on the eligibility for church membership. Revivalists like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield argued that individuals should be in charge of their religious life, not the churches. As "New Lights," they "insisted that no one should be admitted into full church membership unless he had been truly converted." This emotional, personal "inward witness" also had to be visible to others similarly converted. The New Light position was a "revival" of earlier beliefs:

The Puritans had left the Church of England and come to America precisely because they believed that it was contrary to the word of God to permit the

⁹William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

unconverted to enter the church, the mystical body of Christ. To sit down at the Lord's Supper with persons who were sinners, reprobates, damned to eternal hellfire, was to pollute and corrupt the whole principle of a purified church. . . . The Awakening itself was a call from God to return to the old ways, to purify the church, to begin a "new reformation" in New England.¹⁰

The "Old Light" Standing ministers -- the backbone of New England Puritanism -
- held a more charitable view, opposing any return to the old ways:

. . . if men, with their fallible judgement, were to try to distinguish between the saved and the damned with too rigid or fanatical an urge for perfect unity, they would ultimately uproot and excommunicate many who were truly saved but whose state of grace was not visible to moral eyes.¹¹

In congregations throughout New England, the New Light movement to reform the church from within was defeated. Separation ensued, and New Lights began holding their own meetings. Separation, however, violated the rigid church-state power structure prevalent during this time and was a "civil as well as a religious offense." For their "breach of the peace and their defiance of the wholesome laws of the corporate commonwealth," Separatists were often punished by "fines, imprisonment, placing in the stocks, and possibly even whipping."¹²

¹⁰William. G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 19. After 1662, the Halfway Covenant permitted any person to join the local church and sign the covenant becoming a member. The only criteria was a belief in the doctrines of Calvinism and an upright, moral life. "Such persons were allowed only halfway into the church -- they could [sic] have their children [sic] baptized but they could not take communion or vote in church affairs" (p. 6).

¹¹McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus*, p. 20.

¹²McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus*, p. 22. The English Toleration Act of 1689 had freed Anglicans, Quakers, and old-light (pre-Awakened) Baptists to worship "as they pleased" but these sects were not exempt "from paying taxes for the maintenance of Puritan ministers and parish churches" until 1727-1729. The new groups (i.e. Separatists and Separate-Baptists) splintering from the established Congregational church during the 1740s and 1750s found no such toleration. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus*, p. 7 and

In McLoughlin's *Revivals*, E. S. Gaustad calls the "founding of . . . the Separates and the Separate Baptists . . . 'the most conspicuous institutional effect of the Great Awakening in New England.' They 'destroyed the traditional parish system. . . [and] weakened the structure of the establishment.'"¹³ The floodgates to dissent were opened; by 1755, 125 Separate (or strict Congregational) churches existed in New England, and by 1776, 70 Separate Baptist churches (excluding those in Rhode Island) had been formed.¹⁴ After a period of transformation, the Separate-Baptists shed most of their radical schismatic beliefs and practices and became increasingly respectable in the eyes of New Englanders. In 1767 they joined with the Old Baptists, former foes, to form the Warren Association and more effectively fight for Baptist rights. In the process they alienated many of their radical adherents, especially those who took seriously the Biblical admonition, "Be ye perfect." Shadrack Ireland, builder of the Square House in Harvard, Massachusetts, was representative of such radicals. He and his followers, although few in number, took Christ's promise of eternal life literally and expected immortality.¹⁵

Many Separate-Baptists sought religious freedom in the same way as their

Revivals, p. 67.

¹³McLoughlin, *Revivals*, p. 67.

¹⁴McLoughlin, *Revivals*, p. 67.

¹⁵Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 3-4; Marini, "New View," p. 57; Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 23. Mother Ann eventually succeeded in converting many of Ireland's followers and forming a Shaker center in Harvard. Joseph Meacham recounts that Shadrack Ireland came to see him, "and I labored with him; but he would not believe, therefore he has went to hell." [Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Joseph Meacham, *Testimonies*, pp. 224-225.

forefathers by moving to newer territories in the west and north. Increased, but not absolute, toleration replaced the religious restrictions imposed in the long settled areas of Connecticut and eastern Massachusetts. The social climate of western Massachusetts, New York, and the northern states was found to be more favorable and receptive to the Baptist beliefs.¹⁶ There were fewer learned clergymen to censor and discredit the new ideas which caught on rapidly.

The Shakers built their first settlements in this region and drew many of their earliest and most influential converts from the Separate-Baptist ranks. Beginning in the eastern New York district of Niskeyuna and spreading to much of New England in the next ten years, Shakerism came to provide a "welcome combination of spiritual salvation and temporal security" to this generation of evangelical Americans seeking millennial reformation and a life without sin.¹⁷

Nineteenth Century

One similarity between the Shakers and other evangelical Christians is presented in Philip Greven's book *The Protestant Temperament*. Greven's study is based on the premise that distinctive patterns of adult temperament and piety are a response to common early life experiences.¹⁸ Of the three categories suggested by Greven --

¹⁶Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 4.

¹⁷Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 1.

¹⁸Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 16.

evangelical, moderate, and genteel -- the first two may be useful as broad descriptives to characterize time periods in Shaker thought.

Greven characterized evangelicals as "dominated by a persistent and virtually inescapable hostility to the self and all of its manifestations."

Evangelicals were preoccupied with ways to abase, to deny, and to annihilate their own enduring sense of self-worth and selfhood, convinced that only by destroying the self could they conform absolutely and unquestioningly to the sovereign will of God. . . . Once reborn, evangelicals often felt themselves freed from the burdens of their sinful past, and . . . often became extremists and purists, eager to restore their inner and outer worlds to a primitive order of harmony, unity, and self-lessness.¹⁹

The similarity between Mother Ann and the other early Shakers, and Greven's evangelicals is striking. Purging themselves of all sin and living a sinless life through rebirth were the cornerstones of early Shaker beliefs. They believed themselves, as Greven describes, cleansed of the past and bound together in union and order. Continuing religious revivals throughout New England in the early 1800s brought many evangelical reformers and sympathizers to the Shaker ranks. As these revivals waned, however, more converts characteristic of Greven's moderate class were attracted to the Shakers for economic as well as religious reasons.

Greven's category of moderates sought more a middle ground between duty and desire; these moderates were "rarely polarized into the rigid dichotomies of sin and grace" common to the evangelical. Virtue, morality, and self control remained central concerns, necessitating "an extraordinary range of compromises and controls both within

¹⁹Greven, *Protestant Temperament*, pp. 12-13.

and without."²⁰ The transformation of the Shaker society from the days of Joseph Meacham's and Lucy Wright's leadership in the first quarter of the nineteenth century to that of twenty or thirty years later, as seen by the publication and later elaboration of the Shaker's *Millennial Laws*, may be one reflection of the contest between these moderate and evangelical groups.²¹

The internal dissension that was building in the Shaker society in the early part of the nineteenth century seems essentially to have been a split between the evangelical and the moderate camps. As more moderates came into the society from the world, tension increased and attempts to control the membership escalated. The 1840s Shaker period known as "Mother's Work" was an internal evangelical revival and may have been one result of this vying for power. The publication of the second edition of the *Millennial Laws* in 1845 marked the apex of this split in the society. The high apostasy rate

²⁰Greven, *Protestant Temperament*, pp. 13-14.

²¹*Milenial* [sic] *Laws, or Gospel statutes and ordinances adapted to the day of Christ's Second Appearing* (New Lebanon, NY, 1821). Western Reserve Historical Society I B 37 (hereafter cited as WRHS). These laws "represent the first systematic codification" of the rules and orders of the Shakers. They address specific concerns (i.e. worship and the confession of sins) as well as general principles of behavior (i.e. avoiding anger). Evolving out of the pragmatic needs of the expanding society, they regulated not only behavior and activities but also defined "the boundaries between Shakerism and the whole." The 1845 version "sharpened the boundaries between the society and the world, raised the standards of purity among the Believers, and enlarged the areas of supervision by the leaders." Stein, *Shaker Experience*, pp. 95, 198. According to Johnson, one of the "greatest disservice done to the United Society" is the perpetuation of "the view that the *Millennial Laws* of 1845 represented not only the norm for Believers' communal rules, but also the ideal for their daily behavior during the greater parts of their history." This version is "solely a product of that era of spiritual ferment and searching in which they were written." Theodore E. Johnson, "Rules and Orders for the Church of Christ's Second Appearing," in *The Shaker Quarterly* 11, 4 (Winter 1971), pp. 139-140. See also Theodore E. Johnson, "The Millennial Laws of 1821," in *The Shaker Quarterly* 7, 2 (Summer 1967), pp. 35-58; *Millennial Laws, or Gospel Statutes and Obediences adapted to the Day of Christ's Second Appearing* (New Lebanon, NY, 1845), WRHS I B 50. In 1860, the modified and reorganized *Rules and Orders for the Church of Christ's Second Appearing* replaced the 1845 *Laws* (New Lebanon, NY, 1860), WRHS I B 52.

beginning about 1840 and continuing throughout the century could partially reflect a combined result of moderates fleeing the increasing rigidity of the society and the evangelicals reacting to the expanding laxity.

Shaker "Families"

While most proponents of family studies now conceptualize the family as an independent unit bound together by blood or relationship, Shakers saw this traditional family as a threat to their religious beliefs and communal organization. "The marriage of flesh," reportedly spoke Mother Ann, "is a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell." To be a Shaker meant taking up the "full cross" of celibacy and replacing all worldly relationships with a spiritual relationship with God.²² Shakers lived in "families" that were independent socioeconomic groups, but separated affectional members from each other in order to promote spiritual but not relational union. Practical celibacy, as opposed to the religious tenets that upheld the sinfulness of sexual coition, was one means of fostering the Shaker belief in separate but equal authority between the sexes.

Separating husbands from wives and children from parents also served the Shaker interests on another level. Shakers maintained that true followers of Christ could not concentrate solely on the divine when their attentions were consumed by earthly affections; in practice, this separation of family members seemed more to negate and

²²[Bishop and Wells], Testimonies of Jonathan Slossan and Daniel Mosley, *Testimonies*, pp. 285, 296.

deny the existence of family relationships rather than to face the complications such relationships posed in the pursuit of religious or spiritual fulfillment. Order and union, two of the most important concepts in Shakerism, were perhaps more easily and successfully imposed upon, and accepted by, the Shaker brothers and sisters when individuals were stripped of their worldly social roles and stood alone to be chastened and molded by their Shaker superiors.

Research Questions

The roles and contributions of the Shakers' children are important to investigate for several reasons: First, these children were the sect's primary method of longevity and continuity -- a method that, on the surface, seemed to fail. Why it failed is important. Secondly, the effect of separating children from their biological parents and raising children as a group rather than as individuals has an impact on children's commitment and attachment to a group. What role did this play in so many youth leaving the society as they reached adulthood? Understanding these two issues are important components of understanding the numerical decline of the society after the 1840s.

The research is guided by four specific research objectives. The first is to trace the historical settlement of the Shakers in order to place the emergence and perpetuation of the Children's Order. Understanding what beliefs were central to the creation of the Society, how these beliefs reflected American eighteenth and nineteenth century revivalist hopes and expectations, what role these beliefs played in converting people to

the sect, and what beliefs and practices contributed to separating children from adults and creating a specific Shaker Children's Order are the core issues to be addressed.

The second objective is to discuss the role of children in the Society from 1780 to the closing years of the nineteenth century. Leaders' expectations during this period about the role of children and how these changed over time are central to understanding why so few youth committed to a lifetime of Shakerism.

The third objective is to examine the lives of children in the Society -- what was everyday life like for Shaker children? How did they live, work, learn, and worship? Two important questions are: did the socialization process of children effect the numerical decline of the sect, and did the caretaker system influence their allegiance to the society?

The last objective is to relate these historical studies to the field of family studies by making comparisons with childhood and non-communal family life in New England during this time period.

Approaches to the Study

I will use a blend of two research approaches: the historical narrative tradition and the methods and theories of social scientists. In *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, history is defined "as the art of selecting, analyzing, and writing about the

past."²³ Lichtman and French enlarge on this definition, stating that "history is a reasoned argument about the past by which we seek the fullest possible understanding of actions, thoughts, and feelings."²⁴ Historical methods are a "process of reconstructing past events, of determining what actually happened, from historical evidence."²⁵ Social scientists seek, in part, to understand how families function and how family relationships work.

For this study of New Lebanon Shaker children, I am focusing on family "microhistory" -- the study of the lives of particular groups.²⁶ I have benefitted from, but

²³James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, 2nd ed., (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. xix.

²⁴Allen J. Lichtman and Valerie French, *Historians and the Living Past: The Theory and Practice of Historical Study* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1978), p. xvii.

²⁵Lichtman and French, *Historians*, pp. 16-17.

²⁶Lichtman and French, *Historians*, p. 155.

will not directly refer to, research from both social science and family history.²⁷ As frameworks for analysis, I am using research on commitment to utopian or communal societies from the social sciences, and the concepts of interdependence and boundaries from family systems theories.²⁸ For historical methods for family research, I have been

²⁷Such as Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1962); Anne M. Boylan, "Growing Up Female in Young America, 1800-1860," in Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 153-184; Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1992); Carl N. Degler, *Out of Our Past: The Forces That Shaped Modern America* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1959); Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America From the Revolution to the Present* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980); Carl N. Degler, "The Emergence of the Modern American Family," in Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York, NY: St. Martins Press, 1983), pp. 61-79; John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1970); Alice Morse Earl, *Home Life in Colonial Days* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1898; Stockbridge, MA: The Berkshire Traveller Press, 1974, reprint); Michael Gordon, *The American Family: Past, Present and Future* (New York, NY: Random House, 1978); Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970); Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Protestant Temperament*; Philip J. Greven, Jr., "Patterns From the Past," in Gordon, *American Family*, pp. 61-79; Tamara K. Hareven, ed., *Family and Kin in Urban Communities, 1700-1930* (New York, NY: New Viewpoints, 1977); Tamara K. Hareven, "The Home and Family in Historical Perspective," in *Social Research*, 58, 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 253-285; Joseph F. Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America," in Theodore K. Rabb and Rogert I. Rotberg, eds., *The Family in History: Interdisciplinary Essays* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), pp. 95-110; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1976).

²⁸Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); Darwin L. Thomas and Jean Edmonson Wilcox, "The Rise of Family Theory: A Historical and Critical Analysis," in Marvin B. Sussman and Suzanne K. Steinmetz, eds., *The Handbook of Marriage and the Family* (New York, NY: Plenum Press, 1987), pp. 81-102; Gail G. Whitchurch and Larry L. Constantine, "Systems Theory," in Pauline G. Boss, William J. Doherty, Ralph LaRossa, Walter R. Schumm, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz, eds., *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach* (New York, NY: Plenum Press, 1993), pp. 325-352.

aided by the work of Tamara Hareven and Jay Schvaneveldt and his colleagues.²⁹

The Theory of Commitment in Communal Societies

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's research on commitment in communal societies is especially relevant to this current study on the Shaker Children's Order and how the socialization of children contributed to their remaining with the sect as adults. Kanter writes that a utopia "represents an ideal of the good, to contrast with the evils and ills of existing societies. . . . utopian plans are partly . . . a flight *from* and partly a seeking *for*; they criticize, challenge, and reject the established order, then depart from it to seek the perfect human existence."³⁰ Shaker history and the establishment of the Shaker communities in America attest to this premise of a "flight from" and a "seeking for" in their search for the perfect society free from the "evils and ills" of the world.

In a utopian society, "people work and live together closely and cooperatively, in a social order that is self-created and self-chosen rather than externally imposed"; a utopian community is "held together by commitment rather than coercion."³¹

²⁹Tamara K. Hareven, "Historical Analysis of the Family," in Sussman and Steinmetz, *Handbook of Marriage and Family*, pp. 37-57; Tamara K. Hareven, "Family History at the Crossroads," in Tamara Hareven and Andrejs Plakans, eds., *Family History at the Crossroads: A Journal of Family History Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. vii-xxi; Jay D. Schvaneveldt, Robert S. Pickett, and Margaret H. Young, "Historical Methods in Family Research," in Boss, et. al., *Sourcebook of Family Theories*, pp. 99-116.

³⁰Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, pp. 1-2.

³¹Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 1.

Commitment of the members to the group, however, is one of the primary problems facing utopian societies and it is grounded in the group's "human organization." Kanter defines human organization as "how people arrange to do the work that the community needs to survive as a group, and how the group in turn manages to satisfy and involve its members over a long period of time." These organizational problems fall into several categories:

- How to get the work done, but without coercion.
- How to ensure that decisions are made but to everyone's satisfaction.
- How to build close, fulfilling relationships, but without exclusiveness.
- How to choose and socialize new members.
- How to include a degree of autonomy, individual uniqueness, and even deviance.
- How to ensure agreement and shared perception around community functioning and values.³²

All of these can be condensed into the one issue of commitment. Commitment reflects "how members become committed to the community's work, to its values, and to each other, and how much of their former independence they are willing to suspend in the interests of the group." "Committed members," as described by Kanter, "work hard, participate actively, derive love and affection from the communal group, and believe strongly in what the group stands for."³³ Commitment is "central" and essential for the survival of a utopian sect such as the Shakers.

Since the community represents an attempt to establish an ideal social order within the larger society, it must vie with the outside for the members' loyalties. It must ensure high member involvement despite external competition without

³²Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 64.

³³Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 65.

sacrificing its distinctiveness or ideals. It must often contravene the earlier socialization of its members in securing obedience to new demands. It must calm internal dissention in order to present a united front to the world.³⁴

Thus, commitment means that the group or organization expresses and fulfills a fundamental part of a person, little or no conflict exists between organizational and personal needs, and personal needs can not be met outside the organization.³⁵

Three distinct but interrelated aspects of a social system -- the retention of members, group cohesiveness, and social control -- involve commitment and determine the relationship between the group member and the sect.³⁶

Retention refers to people's willingness to stay in the system, to continue to staff it and carry out their roles. Group cohesiveness denotes the ability of people to "stick together," to develop the mutual attraction and collective strength to withstand threats to the group's existence. And social control involves the readiness of people to obey the demands of the system, to conform to its values and beliefs and take seriously it dictates.³⁷

Concurrently, a group member "orients" himself or herself instrumentally, affectively, and morally to the system or sect. Instrumentally means "the rewards and costs that are involved in participating in the system," affectively means ones' "emotional attachment to the people in the system," and morally speaks to the "compellingness of the

³⁴Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 65.

³⁵Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 66.

³⁶Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 67.

³⁷Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 67.

norms and beliefs of the system."³⁸ These orientations are important in assessing overall commitment because a communal sect

is based in part on the desire for strong relations with a collectivity in a place where a person's fundamental emotional needs can be expressed and met through the communal group. . . . Commitment to group cohesion and solidarity requires the attachment of a person's entire fund of emotion and affectivity to the group.³⁹

The concluding remarks of this study will address the degree to which the Shaker's socialization process of the children under their care met Kanter's model of commitment. The issues of retention of members, group cohesiveness, and social control will be addressed by examining the impact of leadership decisions and the evolvement of the sect over time. The three orientations (instrumental, affective, and moral) will be discussed by looking at the daily life of Shaker children, their interaction with the larger Shaker sect, their relationships to caretakers and teachers, and how children were educated both practically and spiritually.

The fourth objective of this study -- comparing the life of a Shaker child with children in the wider New England society -- is important because "maximum commitment" also requires that a group develop "a unity or whole, coherent and sharply differentiated from its environment."⁴⁰ This study will examine if the Shaker Society of the nineteenth century presented enough of a differentiated culture to foster commitment

³⁸Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 68.

³⁹Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 72.

⁴⁰Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 69.

from its youth.

Systems Theory

General systems theory is both a theory of systems in general and a "program of theory construction aimed at building concepts, postulate, principles, and derived theorems that apply universally across all domains of application." Whitchurch and Constantine delineate three core assumptions that distinguish general systems theory: "that system theories can unify science; that a system must be understood as a whole rather than in component parts; and that human systems are unique in their self-reflexivity."⁴¹

The earliest application of system theory to families came from the field of psychiatry and family therapy. Hill and Straus brought it into the field of family social science in the 1970s:

When the whole family is defined as the system, "systems theory can be used to understand intrafamilial processes -- such as family functioning, family communication and transactional patterns, family conflict, separateness and connectedness among members, cohesion, integration, and adaptation to change -- through transactions among family members. . . . Therefore, family processes can be understood as the product of the entire system."⁴²

There are five concepts important in contemporary systems theory: interdependence, hierarchy, boundaries (open/closed systems), equifinality, and feedback

⁴¹Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," pp. 325, 328.

⁴²Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," pp. 325, 330.

and control. Each of these will be briefly discussed.

Interdependence speaks to the connectedness of the individual components of a system. In a family, the individual members are the components and are interdependent -- "held together in a system" -- and exert mutual influence -- what each family member does generally affects every other member.⁴³

Hierarchy is a systems property that embeds the family system within other levels of systems -- "a layering of systems of increasing complexity." Families can be examined in light of the "subsystems" and "suprasystems" of which they are a part. Anything smaller than the family is considered a subsystem; anything larger is a suprasystem. "A hierarchy represents," write Whitchurch and Constantine, "the arrangement of the system into layers of delegation . . . in families, hierarchy and the related issue of power are major concerns."⁴⁴

The concept of boundaries is important in systems theory because it describes what or who is within any given system. "The boundary defines the system and represents the interface, or point of contact between the system and other systems, between the system and its subsystems and suprasystems. . . . Boundaries also mark the interface between the system and its environment." Boundary permeability is a

⁴³Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," p. 332.

⁴⁴Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," pp. 331-332. From an ecological perspective or framework, the environment may also be viewed as a suprasystem. The environment is defined as "everything that is external to a system but in some way in direct or indirect transaction with it" (p. 333).

characteristic of this concept. Permeability describes the ability of information (or matter or energy) to flow into and out of the system. On one end of a continuum that can be used to envision this characteristic are completely open or permeable boundaries -- nothing impedes the flow of information, hence this is "equivalent to having no boundaries." On the other end of the continuum are completely impermeable boundaries which are "closed to interchange from outside the system." Family systems are neither completely open nor completely closed and fall somewhere within the two extremes.⁴⁵

Equifinality describes the "ability of a system to achieve the same goals through different routes." Behavior is thus goal oriented or resulting from "communication of information among components and from how this communication is organized."⁴⁶ For example, in the North Family of the New Lebanon Shaker community the chair industry developed first because chairs were needed for the sect's use, and secondly because the world's people were willing to buy chairs, financially benefitting the Society and enabling them to maintain their "temporal order" of freedom from debt.

The last concept, feedback and control, is a way to describe how information is used within a system. A feedback loop is a closed path "along which information can be traced from one point in a system, through one or more other parts of the system or its environment, and back to the point of origin." This "closed loop" system "is capable of regulating its own behavior because information entering the loop is transformed and

⁴⁵Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," p. 333.

⁴⁶Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," p. 334.

ultimately fed back into the loop." Once a system and a pattern of communication are established, the system maintains this pattern through either negative or positive feedback.⁴⁷

Negative feedback loops work to keep a pattern stable by minimizing deviation and restoring or maintaining equilibrium or "homeostasis":

A system responds to any source of disturbance, whether of internal or external origin, by acting to reduce the deviation from the prior state of homeostasis. That is, when any deviation from the state of homeostasis occurs, the system responds by enacting negative feedback to bring the system back to the previous homeostatic state.⁴⁸

Positive feedback loops are the opposite of negative loops and seek to amplify the deviation causing more rather than less variation. They seek to establish a new status quo rather than maintaining a previous one.

Applying System Theory to the Shaker Children's Order

When this research was first initiated, system theory was conceptualized to be a valuable tool to analyze the data and assess the processes used to socialize the children and answer the four research questions. However, in light of the evidence I am using, systems theory is not useful in this study to analyze or assess the success or failure of the

⁴⁷Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," p. 334.

⁴⁸Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," pp. 334-335. An example of this is the Shaker period termed "Mother Ann's Work" during which some members of the sect sought to restore the strong spiritual basis to the Society. This time period and its impact are briefly discussed in Chapter Five.

Society's socialization of children, primarily because so little was found about the internal communication processes in the sect. Shaker journals and diaries record events, but they do not record the emotional or psychological impact of such events or how various Shakers felt about them. The one general exception to this is the anger and hopelessness expressed in many writings at the departure of members from the sect.

Given this general assessment of system theory's lack of usefulness for looking at the internal processes, system theory can, however, be useful as a way to depict what the Shakers termed "temporal order" or the practical organization of the Society. As such, systems theory will be used to describe the Society's structure in the next section but will not be used as an analytical theory in the Chapter Six conclusions.

Interdependence

In this study, interdependence -- meaning that an event, situation, or behavior affecting one member of the family affects all the other members as well -- is important because the extent to which Shaker children and youth were committed to the Society impacted the future of all the members. This study suggests that the decline of the Society was due in part to the adults' inability to keep the children brought into the sect as committed members once they had attained adult status at age twenty-one. As the number of youth leaving the sect escalated during the nineteenth century, fewer sect members were available to meet the work demands of the family and outside labor was needed to maintain the family economically, the family's boundaries became more

permeable by necessity not choice, and the structure and organization of the families and of the Society changed to reflect fewer members. Therefore, the loss of young members throughout the century reduced the ability of the family to maintain its system stability and forced it to change in multiple ways (positive feedback loop).

Hierarchy

The New Lebanon Children's Order is a subsystem of the Church Family in New Lebanon. The Church Family is conceptualized as a family system embedded in the New Lebanon Shaker community system -- a second and larger system level. For the purposes of this study, which does not look at other Shaker communities in New England, the larger non-Shaker culture of eastern New York and New England -- the "world" -- is considered the environment. Thus, this study places the New Lebanon Children's Order as the lowest and least complex system in a four system model.

Boundaries and Open/Closed Systems

In this study, system boundaries and the openness, or lack of openness, of the systems are important concepts. The Children's Order was designed to be separate from the Church Order, and the community was designed to be separate from the world. Both were open systems but with little boundary permeability. The separation instituted by this closed system influenced the socialization of the children and the success of instilling the mechanisms of commitment discussed in the previous section on commitment in

utopias.

While the Children's Order subsystem operated fairly autonomously, its emotional climate was always dependent on the personal qualities and beliefs of those who voluntarily chose to join a celibate system that shunned the personal relationships and family functions characteristic of the New England culture. Ultimately, because of their doctrine of celibacy, all levels of the Shaker systems were dependent upon each other for their continuance and survival.

From the time of its move into the Church until the late 1830s, the Children's Order exhibited a relatively low level of openness. Information as well as contact with others, especially those of the world, was strictly regulated and restricted. By the late 1820s, Shaker children and youth lived, worked, ate, and learned only in the company of one or two caretaker/teachers and other children of the same sex. Their only worldly exposure was through a few restricted books and the presence of the world's people at Sabbath worship services.

This openness increased when neighboring children not of the sect began attending the Shaker school in the 1830s. As the century progressed, however, and the numbers of youth leaving or being removed rose, revivalism resurfaced in the sect and the leaders once again closed the Society's doors to the public. Thus, the boundaries again seemed to become less open both around the Children's Order and the Society itself.

Not until the decades after the Civil War did information flow more freely;

gradually, worldly influences were seen and felt within the Society. From that point on, permeability continued to increase and the systems slowly opened more completely as Believers traveled, read freely, and depended more upon the world's people for their survival.

Equifinality

As Whitchurch and Constantine point out, equifinality is a characteristic of open systems.⁴⁹ However, the discussion in the previous section concluded that the Children's Order was largely a closed system until mid-nineteenth century. Little data was found that described the methods of spiritually educating children and thus building Kanter's moral commitment through embracing the religious tenets of the sect. Therefore it is difficult to draw conclusions on whether or not a variety of approaches were used to achieve the same end, which in this case was the retention of young adult members.

Feedback and Control

Negative feedback loops seem to be characteristic of the communication within and related to the Children's Order. Again, the dearth of data on the affective life of Shakers makes it difficult to use this concept with any success to understand the processes inherent in the Shaker systems. However, the data can be interpreted to suggest that the emphasis was on maintenance of the status quo (termed "temporal order" by the

⁴⁹Whitchurch and Constantine, "Systems Theory," p. 334.

Shakers), not deviations from it. Strict segregation of the children and youth from the adult members of the Family worked to monitor and filter any information about events outside the Order and events in the world. The system of work mentors for the boys further reduced their association with adult males; girls had more association with the women of the Society but still had relatively little time that was not strictly regulated by "orders" about speech and work.

Methodology

Methods

My research began with locating primary and secondary sources about the Shakers. The secondary sources have already been discussed previously in this chapter. For primary sources, the search was approached in two ways: visiting the sites of former New England Shaker villages and locating major Shaker collections of print material written by or about the Shakers.⁵⁰ I began my personal community visits with Hancock Shaker Village in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, because it is one of the most complete Shaker village museums that exists in New England. I also called on The Shaker Museum in Old Chatham, New York, for knowledge of both the Shaker material culture and their collection of primary documents. Regardless of their present uses, visits to what remains of the other New England Shaker communities, especially Watervliet, New Lebanon,

⁵⁰Beginning with the most northerly villages: Sabbathday Lake and Alfred, Maine; Enfield and Canterbury, New Hampshire; Harvard, Shirley, Tyringham, and Hancock, Massachusetts; New Lebanon and Watervliet, New York; and Enfield, Connecticut.

Canterbury, and Sabbathday Lake gave me a sense of connection and recognition that I could not gain solely through reading or viewing photographs.

The two major collections of print material I am using for this research are: The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection at Winterthur Museum in Winterthur, Delaware, and the Shaker Manuscript Collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

The Andrews are credited with being the first to bring Shakerism into the public limelight; Dr. and Mrs. Andrews assiduously collected hundreds of manuscripts and artifacts from the New York and Massachusetts Shaker communities, beginning early in the twentieth century. The majority of these manuscripts and some of their furniture collection were given to Winterthur Museum in the 1960s.⁵¹

The collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society began in 1911 as many Shaker communities were closing. Wallace H. Cathcart, President and later Director of the Historical Society, began the collection, enlisting the help and cooperation of Shaker leaders in several communities.⁵² I used the microfiche version of this collection.

In addition to these two collections, I am using manuscripts and/or diaries from The Shaker Museum on Old Chatham, New York, and from Hancock Shaker Museum in

⁵¹Faith Andrews Interviews with Robert Brown, January 14, 1982 - April 23, 1982, Pittsfield, MA. Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE.

⁵²James W. Gilreath, "The Formation of the Western Reserve Historical Society's Shaker Collection," *The Journal of Library History*, VIII, 3 & 4 (July - October 1973); Kermit J. Pike, "Shaker Manuscripts and How They Came to be Preserved," *Manuscripts* XXXIX, 4 (Fall 1977); Bonnie J. Boulton, *A Community Documents Its History: A Brief Account of the Shaker Historical Society and the Elizabeth Nord Library* (Kent State, OH: unpublished thesis, 1994).

Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The statistical data used in this study is from the extensive research of Priscilla J. Brewer, published primarily in *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives*.

Criteria for Selection of Materials and Parameters of the Study

The research is limited to the New Lebanon, New York, Shaker community because it was the second oldest (founded in 1787) and the seat of the Lead Ministry for all the communities until 1947. The elders and eldersses who governed and led all the Shakers resided in this community, and most of the Shaker publications on children originated here. The first separation of children into their own order and the building of the first school occurred in New Lebanon. Therefore, the selection of primary material to be included in this research is limited to those diaries, letters, monographs, etc., that were written by or written about members of the New Lebanon community (especially children, caretakers, or leaders) or were written by Shaker leaders before the New Lebanon community was "gathered into order."

To locate primary printed materials, I am using the printed guides of the Winterthur Collection and the Western Reserve Historical Society.⁵³ Richard McKinstry at Winterthur Museum also was very generous in helping locate and evaluate resources in the Andrews collection. At The Shaker Museum and Hancock Shaker Village, I relied predominately on the library staff and their knowledge about their respective collections.

⁵³McKinstry, *Shaker Collection*; Kermit J. Pike, *A Guide to Shaker Manuscripts* (Cleveland, OH: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1974).

The beginning of the twentieth century as the end of the time frame considered for this research is a second parameter of the study. The last major publication by the Shakers was White and Taylor's *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message* in 1904.⁵⁴ Since that date, Shakers themselves have written little to the "world" although the number of secondary publications about the Shakers has increased. Additionally, Shakerism was on a relentless decline by the beginning of the twentieth century, and few children were accepted into the Order after 1900.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in both a chronological and topical manner. In order to understand the separation of children into their own order, Chapter Two presents a chronological overview of the founding and establishment of Shakerism -- Shaker beginnings and gathering into "gospel order." The focus is on Mother Ann Lee and her immediate English and American successors -- the second generation of leaders.

Chapter Three describes the various ways children were gathered into the Shaker Children's Order. The two predominant ways children were brought into the sect were with parents who joined the Shakers and by parents who choose to indenture their child or children but did not themselves join. Children were legally bound to the society by an indenture process, and the males were then "apprenticed" to craftsmen within the Shaker

⁵⁴Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message* (Columbus, OH: Press of Fred J. Herr, 1904; New York, NY: AMS Press, 1972, reprint).

community. If the indentures were legally binding, as the Shakers believed they were, it is difficult to understand why so many children were removed from the society by parents and guardians starting mid-nineteenth century, seemingly with little challenge.⁵⁵

The daily life of Shaker children is the topic of Chapter Four. Everyday life reflected the two economic and temporal reasons children were brought into the society: their numbers were essential for the continuity of the sect and their physical labor contributed to the economic welfare of the Shakers. Until the 1830s children were considered little adults, both in the Shaker society and in the larger world. Childhood, from birth to age sixteen, was not necessarily a valuable period in a person's life, nor was it sharply distinguished in character from adulthood.⁵⁶ The changing perception of marriage and the increasing importance placed on parenthood and childhood over the course of the nineteenth century may have contributed to the rapid decline of the Shakers during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Five explores the initial role of education in the society and the Ministry's

⁵⁵Brewer has contributed greatly to the statistical knowledge of the New England Shaker communities in *Shaker Communities*. For a discussion of the New Lebanon Church Family membership and apostasy rates see John E. Murray, "Determinants of Membership Levels and Duration in a Shaker Commune, 1780-1880," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 34, 1 (1995), pp. 35-48. Murray proposes that one possible factor in the numerical decline of the Shakers was "a decline in the quality of the Shaker entrants over time." Using "signature literacy" to compare literacy levels of entrants and urban versus rural place of birth to compare tenure in the society, this research suggests that "ever greater numbers of poorly prepared urbanites entered over the course of the nineteenth century. Urban-born men were three-fourths again as likely to leave as rural-born men, and urban-born women half again as likely." Those Shakers skilled in a trade were, however, "less likely to apostatize." John Edward Murray, *Communal Living Standards and Membership Incentives: The Shakers, 1780-1880* (The Ohio State University, OH: unpublished dissertation, 1992). *Dissertations Abstracts International*, 53, 8 (February 1993), p. 2925-A.

⁵⁶Degler, "Modern American Family," p. 65.

attitudes toward education. The educational agenda for children grew out of a program focused on educating the adults; both were aimed at producing union and order, not knowledgeable Shakers. In the Shaker mind, education and conduct were tightly interwoven; how one behaved carried far more weight than how well one could spell or render sums. Beyond a basic education of reading, writing, and arithmetic, book learning was considered a deterrent to the knowledge of God. Education was also perceived as a threat; those who are taught to think, often question. In a society based on conformity and adherence to law, questions disrupted order, unity, and control. Diminishing individuality, not encouraging it, was the aim of education in the Shaker schools.

The last chapter summarizes the role of the Children's Order, both as a separate, and at times influential, unit, and as a component in the decline of Shakerism after the middle of the nineteenth century. Children played an increasingly minor role after the 1860s, partially because so few converted at adulthood, and partially because of changing societal and economic conditions outside the Shaker society that had previously induced parents to give up their children to the sect. One tentative conclusion from my research to date is that the fundamental basis for maintaining children in this celibate society shifted from an emphasis on spiritual contributions to an emphasis on economic contributions and that this perceptual shift influenced the number of children who remained with the Shakers as adults. The impact of the caretaker approach to raising children is discussed in relationship to the numerical decline of the sect and comparisons are made of the lives of Shaker children to children living in non-communal households.

Contributions of the Study

This research contributes to the discipline of family studies in two ways. One contribution is the use of historical narrative methods within a social science perspective. Current family studies research is generally limited to issues affecting families today; seldom are the historical roots or the various manifestations of the concept of "family" examined in family development. The rise of social history -- and, in particular, family history -- during the last thirty years signals the increasing comfort with, and use of, social sciences methods and theories by historians. The reverse, social scientists using historical research methods, is far less common. This study illustrates how the two approaches can be blended by presenting the Shakers interpretative managing of a specific family component -- children -- and showing how children were incorporated into what was essentially an adult religious experience.

This research also contributes to the family studies literature by enlarging upon the concept of "family" both historically and definitionally. Groups that perceive their structure in terms of family units but that function in ways that preclude blood or affectional relationships need not be excluded from the current study of families by social scientists. Carl Degler, in "The Emergence of the Modern American Family," maintains that the modern family began to take shape in America between the years of the Revolution and 1830.⁵⁷ This family was primarily characterized by marriage based on mutual affection, child-centeredness, and the doctrine of two spheres that placed women

⁵⁷Degler, "Modern American Family," p. 65.

in the home caring for house and children and men earning a living in the world.⁵⁸ The Shakers offered one alternative way of life to the emerging societal norm.

In terms of contribution to the Shaker literature, other than Andrews' 1973 article, no publication specifically focusing on the Shaker Children's Order is known. While the current research represents only one community, it is a foundation on which a more encompassing portrayal of children in the Society can be built. Understanding the mechanisms of commitment, how they were implemented in the New Lebanon Shaker Children's Order, and the influence of the socialization of children as a factor in the longevity of the Society may help to better comprehend the demise of the sect after the 1840s.

⁵⁸Gordon, *American Family*, p. 22.

CHAPTER TWO. GATHERING INTO GOSPEL ORDER

Introduction

The first section in this chapter traces the English roots of the Shaker sect -- its charismatic leader Ann Lee, its Quaker roots, and how Lee and a small group of dedicated followers left England for America at the start of the Revolutionary War. The second section focuses on the American years 1774 to 1796. The topics include the sect's early trials on American soil, the establishment of the first settlement at Niskeyuna, New York; the "opening of the gospel" and the travels of the leaders to gain converts; and, finally, the deaths of William and Ann Lee. The last section of this chapter discusses the second generation of leaders -- the establishment of "gospel order" under Joseph Meacham and the appointment of Lucy Wright as his coleader and successor.

English Beginnings

Ann Lee was born February 29, 1736 in Manchester, England, the second oldest of eight children of John Lees, a blacksmith and tailor.¹ She was baptized into the Anglican Church on June 1, 1742. Her life followed the familiar pattern of the poor

¹Ann had five brothers -- Joseph, James, David, William and George -- and two sisters -- Mary and Nancy. Her father is described as "poor, respectable in character, moral in principle, honest and punctual in his dealings, and industrious in business." The surname Lees was shortened to Lee about the time Ann left England and settled in New York. [Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 2. For a discussion about the town and its religious and social climate during this period, see Henry D. Rack, "Establishment, Evangelicals and Enthusiasm in 18th Century Manchester, England," *The Shaker Quarterly* 17, 2 & 3 (Summer & Fall, 1989), pp. 35-53, 75-95.

classes: no schooling (resulting in lifelong illiteracy) because survival depended on everyone contributing to the family income.² At an early age, Ann worked in the handloom textile mills, and later as a cook in the local infirmary or mental hospital. An early Shaker history describes Ann as a child with "a very bright and active genius . . . remarkably sagacious, but serious and thoughtful, never addicted to play like other children . . . the subject of religious impressions and . . . particularly favored with heavenly visions." Because Ann seemed to be concerned with the lost state of her soul as well as that of all mankind, these religious visions and impressions centered on the "great depravity of human nature and the odiousness of sin."³

Shaker biographers describe Ann's childhood years as ones of emotional dissatisfaction and yearning; her quest for personal knowledge of God remained unfulfilled. Reliance on the religious tenets of the Anglican faith failed to fill this void in Ann's life. The death of her mother during Ann's childhood meant not only increased responsibilities for the care and rearing of her siblings, but also the loss of her sole source of support and comfort, especially in spiritual matters. Not finding solace in the Anglican church or teachings, Ann sought religious enlightenment in a small society of Quaker

²[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 2.

³[Calvin Green and Seth Y. Wells], *A Summary View of the Millennial Church or United Society of Believers, Commonly Called Shakers: Comprising the Rise, Progress and Practical Order of the Society Together with the General Principles of Their Faith and Testimony* (Albany, NY: C. Van Benthuysen, 1823), p. 6. For a discussion about the limitations of primary documents during this early period, see Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 9 and Marini, "New View," pp. 48-51.

dissenters led by James and Jane Wardley.⁴

As an adult, Ann possessed a "strong constitution, rather exceeding the ordinary size of women." She was "well proportioned," of a fair complexion with blue eyes and "light chestnut brown" hair.⁵

In appearance, she was very majestic, and her countenance was such as inspired confidence and respect; and by many of the world . . . she was called beautiful. . . . She possesses remarkable powers and faculties of mind, in nature, which were greatly [sic] enlarged and strengthened by the gift of God.⁶

In speech, Ann used her words judiciously but appropriately, never speaking "in vain." She is recorded as being able with few words, if not "with a single word or touch of the hand," to "instantly raise individuals, and sometimes a whole assembly, from a state of the deepest tribulation and distress of soul, to a state of the most heavenly joy and comfort."⁷

She inspired, into the hearts of her children, the greatest fear of God, and commanded the most unbounded love and respect, of any person living. Her countenance was mild and lovely; yet grave and solemn. In reproof she was terrible; in admonition she was quick, sharp and powerful as lightening; yet always careful not to hurt the oil and wine; but labor to save all that God owned.⁸

Prior to Ann's joining the Wardley Society at the age of twenty-two in September 1758, the Wardleys had come under the influence of the French Prophets, or Camisards, a

⁴[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 13.

⁵[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 343.

⁶[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 343.

⁷[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 343-344.

⁸[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 343-344.

radical sect of Calvinists who had sought refuge from persecution in England after Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Camisard teachings incorporated by the Wardleys and fused with their Quaker beliefs included fasts and trances, physical agitations, prophecies of the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ, and calls for repentance. From these Prophets, the Wardleys "had been favored with a greater degree of divine light."⁹ Both societies were unstructured and adopted no doctrines as rules of faith or worship. Both believed in a personal relationship with God and were led by revelation, guided entirely by the operations of the Spirit of God.¹⁰

Worship rotated from house to house among the Wardley members, often beginning in true Quaker fashion of waiting in silent meditation for personal inspiration or inner light. Soon to follow, however, was tumultuous trembling and shaking, singing and shouting brought about by the power of God working within. Spiritual signs and visions were frequent, exhorting the followers to repent as the millennium was at hand.¹¹ Members did not lead meetings as all had the ability to experience God and share their light. Both men and women were equal recipients of leadings and were equal leaders,

⁹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 4; Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1953), pp. 5-6. For a further discussion of the Camisards see Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); H. Schwartz, *The French Prophets* (Berkeley, CA: University Press of California, 1980); C. Taylor, *The Camisards* (London, England: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1893).

¹⁰[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 11; [Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 4; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, pp. 5-7; Marini, "New View," pp. 52, 56.

¹¹Benjamin Seth Youngs and Calvin Green, *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, 2nd ed., (Albany, NY: E. and E. Hosford, 1810), p. xxv.

although members accepted Jane Wardley as the acknowledged spiritual guide.

Two specific beliefs and practices of the Wardley group appealed to Ann: the full confession of sin and taking up a "full and final cross" against everything known to be evil.¹² In Jane Wardley and the Wardley Society, Ann found the maternal comfort, protection, and security she had missed since the death of her mother and, eventually, the spiritual answers she sought.¹³

Anglican and societal traditions, however, still had the power to influence Ann's life. In 1762 Ann wed her father's apprentice, Abraham Stanley (or Standerin), "who was a blacksmith by trade, and lived with her, at her father's house, while she remained in England."¹⁴ While Abraham is depicted in the Shaker literature as a kindly and good-natured but lusty man, he apparently did not share the mystical and sensitive nature of his wife. Nevertheless, a woman in eighteenth century England had little, if any, legal existence apart from her male superiors -- father, brothers, or husband. As reported in the sect's writings, Ann's religious beliefs about the sinfulness of "fleshly coition" and her association with the Wardley Society were nullified by the confines of English society and the subservient status of the female. Marriage bans for Ann Lee and Abraham Stanley were posted in the Anglican cathedral for the customary three weeks before their

¹²[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 4.

¹³[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 13.

¹⁴[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 3.

marriage on January 5, 1762.¹⁵

Ann's four children born in the early years of marriage died in infancy.¹⁶ Feeling intense guilt and shame for the deaths, *Testimonies* records that Ann renewed her commitment to free herself from sinful bondage, as revealed in statements by two early Shaker sisters:

Sometimes I labored all night, continually crying to God for my own redemption . Thus I labored in strong cries and groans to God, day and night, till my flesh wasted away, and I became like a skeleton . . . until my soul broke forth to God.¹⁷ In my travail and tribulation, my sufferings were so great, that my flesh consumed upon my bones, and bloody sweat pressed through the pores of my skin, and I became as helpless as an infant. And when I was brought through, and born into the spiritual Kingdom, I was like an infant just born into the world; they see colours [sic] and objects; but they know not what they see; and so it was with me, when I was born to the spiritual world.¹⁸

Ann shared her spiritual journey with the other members of the Wardley group, enhancing her own standing and encouraging and increasing the faith and testimony of others. Her oracles seemingly stimulated the meditative trances and muses of the group; what she envisioned was accepted by the other Wardley members. The overall purpose of Ann's spiritual search focused not only on her own soul but also on the lost state of mankind.¹⁹

¹⁵The willing participation of Ann in this marriage remains unclear. The earliest written Shaker history was not published until 1808, twenty-four years after Ann's death in 1784.

¹⁶[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 3. Three were stillborn and the fourth, Elizabeth, died in infancy in 1766. Marini, "New View," p. 52.

¹⁷[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Sarah Barker, *Testimonies*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁸[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Mary Tiffany, *Testimonies*, p. 48.

¹⁹[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 14.

Shaker historians suggest that Ann was "wrought upon in this manner, more or less" for nine years, 1761 to 1770. These years of spiritual labor and incessant prayers for inner strength and guidance culminated when "the mysteries of the spiritual world were brought clearly to her understanding, [as] she saw the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory."²⁰ Restoration of her physical health and a more zealous role in the Wardley order followed. Her individual spiritual travel, she believed, was symbolic of a universal struggle between the flesh and the spirit, darkness and light. She was now convinced the deplorable loss of the human race was because of "fleshly cohabitation of the sexes"²¹ -- the "source and foundation of human corruption"²² and the "root of all evil."²³ Ann's firm belief in celibacy as the only path to a sinless life and perfection was one recorded result of this spiritual struggle.²⁴

As her commitment to living a sinless life increased, so did her voice in the Wardley Society. She preached openly and vehemently in favor of celibacy, gaining converts from such unlikely sources as her father and younger married brother William,

²⁰[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 9.

²¹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 3.

²²[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 6.

²³[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 49.

²⁴[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 49.

later to become the much loved parental leader, Father William.²⁵ During this time, the wealthy John Hocknell joined the Society and was later instrumental in bringing the Shaker testimony to America. Another exceptional convert was the young James Whittaker, who, at Ann Lee's death in 1784, assumed leadership of the growing Shaker sect.

Criticisms of the established Church of England provoked those opposed to the Wardley views and brought persecution to the members as reported in *Testimonies*. The worship practices of the Wardleys -- the "shaking, trembling, speaking in unknown tongues, [and] prophesying" -- led to acts of oppression and violence against the Believers.²⁶

The piercing and heart searching power of Mother's testimony against sin . . . stirred up the rage and enmity . . . of almost every class and description; to such a degree that by formal opposition and tumultuous mobs, open persecution and secret malice, her very life and existence seemed in continual jeopardy.²⁷

Ann was imprisoned at least three times while in England, the first during the summer of 1770 on a charge of profaning the Sabbath. Shaker histories chronicle the

²⁵Her brother William was one of those who sought her counsel. According to the 1816 *Testimonies*, William was born "about the year 1840, and was brought up in the occupation of a blacksmith by his father. He was married and had one son; and was afterwards an officer of horse, in the king's royal guard. . . . In his person, he was a commanding figure, rather above middling height; thick set, strong built, and large limbs; of an open and very bold countenance . . . his hair was of a light chestnut brown, blue eyes, and a remarkable strong, sonorous, and powerful voice." Ann "reproved him for his pride, and convinced him of the wickedness of his life. He immediately threw off his ruffles and silks, and put his hands to work, and his heart to God; and labored faithfully to find forgiveness of his sins, and acceptance of God." [Bishop and Wells], pp. 333-334.

²⁶[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 16, 50-65.

²⁷[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 7-8.

grand prophetic vision that marked Ann's ascendancy to leadership of the Wardley sect occurred during this imprisonment. In this vision, proclaimed Ann, "the very transgression of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden . . . wherein all mankind were lost and separated from God," was made plain.²⁸ She went on to describe the appearance of God in this vision, offering comfort, and commissioning Ann to hereafter preach a gospel of sinlessness. The central tenet in Shaker thought -- Ann Lee as the female incarnation of God, as Jesus was the male incarnation -- dates to this vision. "I am the first Elder in the Church -- I have seen God, and spoke with him, face to face, as we speak to one another."²⁹ "It is not I that speak; it is Christ who dwells in me."³⁰

Accounts by early converts record that this "gift" of "the light and power of God," now revealed in Ann, and consequently in them through her testimony, gave all who believed dominance over sin, and opened them to other gifts of the Holy Spirit. Members readily acknowledged Ann as their spiritual Mother in Christ; hereafter she was called Mother Ann.³¹ Those who rejected Ann's testimony "lost all their former light and power, and fell back into a state of darkness, and into the common course of the world."³²

From the time of this vision in 1770 to the spring of 1772, Mother Ann and her

²⁸[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 6.

²⁹[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Elizabeth Hill, *Testimonies*, p. 206.

³⁰[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Jonathan Slosson, *Testimonies*, pp. 206-207.

³¹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 7.

³²[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 10.

brother William exhorted the followers to testify openly about sinfulness and the revelations of God as envisioned by Ann. Persecution continued to plague the Shakers; *Testimonies* reports that twice more Ann was imprisoned and once an attempt was made to stone her, William, James and Daniel Whittaker, and James Shephard to death:

. . . and the mob brought as many stones as two men could carry and placed them on the side of a hill; and then began to cast them at us; but they could not hit any of us; (except Daniel, who received a slight wound on one of his temples;) upon which they fell into contention among themselves.³³

Divine intervention seemingly strengthened and protected the abused followers during this, and other, episodes of cruelty and oppression; in describing this incident to later Believers, Ann recalled: "While they were throwing their stones, I felt surrounded with the presence of God. . . . I knew that they would not kill me, because my work was not done."³⁴ Such abuses served not only to strengthen the Believer's testimony but also to escalate the attacks by the opposition.

Ann's last imprisonment in England apparently occurred early in 1772. Again, as revealed in the Shaker stories, those fighting Ann and her followers met more than was visibly apparent; Believers lives were evidently protected and preserved by some interposing power notwithstanding all attempts to destroy it. Abuse of the Shakers ended quickly when some of her most bitter persecutors met a sudden and untimely death. For the next two years Ann and her followers enjoyed their faith in peace.³⁵

³³[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 58.

³⁴[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 58.

³⁵[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 13; [Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 64, 381-396.

The Call to Travel: Settlement in America

Ever intent on the inspirational leadings of God, according to *Testimonies*, Ann was directed to America, receiving a divine promise "that the work of God would greatly increase and the millennial church would be established in that country."³⁶ The visions of other Believers apparently confirmed the call to travel. Especially vivid was James Whittaker's vision of the church of Christ in America that appeared as a large tree whose leaves "shone with such brightness, as made it appear like a burning torch."³⁷ The English Believers sailed from England on May 19, 1774, and arrived in New York City on August 6th.³⁸

From August of 1774 until the spring of 1776, the Shaker believers "were scattered, seeking their livelihood, by their hand labor, wherever they could find employment."³⁹ Ann and Abraham remained in New York City, she employed as a washerwoman and he as a journeyman blacksmith. John Hocknell (who had paid passage for the eight from England) and the rest of the group "went upriver," purchasing a tract of land in the wilderness district of Niskeyuna, near Albany, New York, from American

³⁶[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 8. This decision to leave England may have been influenced by the restrictions placed on their preaching and the failure of the Society to increase. See Flo Morse, *The Shakers and The World's People* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1980), pp. 17-20; Whitson, *Two Centuries*, p. 14; John McKelvie Whitworth, *God's Blueprints: A Sociological Study of Three Utopian Sects* (London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 15.

³⁷[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of James Whittaker, *Testimonies*, p. 66.

³⁸English Shakers journeying to America were: Ann Lee and her husband Abraham, her brother William Lee, James Whittaker, John Hocknell and his son, Richard Hocknell, James Shephard, Mary Partington, and a niece, Nancy Lee. [Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 8-9.

³⁹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 9.

Quaker Friends. They cleared a portion and built a crude log cabin with the first floor for the "sisters" and the second for the "brethren."⁴⁰

William Lee was employed as a blacksmith in Albany and James Whittaker, a weaver, also found employment. Whittaker supervised work on a small farm which was tended by Shepherd, the two Hocknells, Nancy Lees, and Mary Partington. Shortly thereafter, John Hocknell returned to New York and sailed for England to "settle his affairs" and "bring out" his wife Hannah, his family, and his friend John Partington. During Hocknell's absence, Ann journeyed to the new settlement several times and "was occasionally visited, by some of them."⁴¹

While the beginnings of a permanent settlement were being formed in Niskeyuna, Ann reportedly remained faithful to Abraham, although insisting on a celibate marriage. Abraham seemingly soon found the ways of the world too enticing to resist, however. *Testimonies* records that after a long serious illness through which he was nursed by Ann, Abraham "lost all sense of the gospel, and began, in a very ungodly manner, to oppose Mother's faith," eventually disappearing into New York City and breaking all his ties to the sect. Thus ended Ann's thirteen year marriage and her final tie to the "world." She remained alone in New York "with poverty, privation and hunger" her "frequent companions."⁴²

⁴⁰[Bishop and Wells] *Testimonies*, p. 9; Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 15. In early Shaker writings, the spelling of this first settlement was "Neskeyuna."

⁴¹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 9; Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 15.

⁴²[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 11.

The Hocknells arrived in Philadelphia from England on December 25, 1775, traveling by land to New York, and soon after moved to Niskeyuna. The following spring, Mother Ann left New York for the last time and joined "joined the rest of the Society."⁴³ The Believers were "finally gathered and settled . . . where they began to prepare the way . . . for the opening of the gospel."⁴⁴

Shaker histories describe the next few years as filled with "zeal and industry" to improve their "temporal circumstances" -- felling trees and tilling the land, draining swamps, and building "so as to enjoy a comfortable living." Few opportunities existed, however, to preach the Shaker gospel. Ann encouraged daily and even hourly worship to sustain their hopes and preserve their union. "O my dear children!" she implored the family, "hold fast, and be not discouraged. God has not sent us into this land in vain; but he has sent us to bring the gospel to this nation, who are deeply lost in sin; and there are great numbers who will embrace it, and the time draws nigh."⁴⁵

Ann's vision of an "opening of the gospel" -- the Shaker phrase for recruitment of new Shakers and the acceptance of Shaker theology -- continued despite the harsh reality of few American converts. During the spring of 1779, she had repeated visions of people flocking to hear the word and gave orders to lay up surplus stores of provisions because the Shakers would soon "have company enough, before another year comes about, to

⁴³[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 9.

⁴⁴[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 12.

⁴⁵[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 13-14.

consume it all."⁴⁶

The winter of 1779-1780 brought another wave of religious revivalism, this time in the churches of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Joseph Meacham, a New Light preacher from Enfield, Connecticut, was one of the revival leaders. As in the 1740s, issues of free will, human responsibility, piety, and Arminianism were again debated by factions and fragments of the Congregational church.⁴⁷ Expectations for the appearance of the long awaited millennium ran high, but as the winter wore on, nothing occurred. Spent emotionally and ungratified by the continued absence of the Lord, Meacham evidently sought another route to salvation by visiting the Shakers at Niskeyuna (renamed Watervliet about this time) during the first days of May 1780. Meacham and Calvin Harlow, also destined to become a Shaker leader, were reported to be "among the first that visited this little church."⁴⁸

⁴⁶[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 14.

⁴⁷Arminianism stems from the theology of Dutchman Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609); it is the belief that predestination is "conditioned by God's foreknowledge of human free choices," *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd. ed., (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), p. 100.

⁴⁸[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Jethro Turner, *Testimonies*, p. 21; Theodore E. Johnson, ed., "Biographical Account of the Life, Character, & Ministry of Father Joseph Meacham the Primary Leader in Establishing the United Order of the Millennial Church by Calvin Green 1827," *The Shaker Quarterly* 10, 2 & 3 (Summer & Fall 1970), pp. 20-32, 51-68, 92-102. According to Johnson, Green is one of the "most important figures in the development of Believers' life and thought during the first half of the nineteenth century." Born into the faith at Hancock in 1780 (Mother Ann converted his mother four and a half months before his birth), he was "an ubiquitous and vocal spokesman for the Shaker way" until his death in 1869 at New Lebanon. As well as "one of the greatest of Shaker theologians," Green was also a "dedicated recorder of Shaker history. . . . Not only was he chiefly responsible for the 1823 and 1848 editions of *A Summary View of the Millennial Church* . . . he was also the chief revisor of the 1856 edition of the *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*." The "Biographical Account of . . . Father Joseph Meacham" "is the only serious attempt by a Believer at a full-length treatment of Shakerism's first American-born leader" (pp. 20-22). .

Testimonies record that Ann believed that she had foreseen the arrival of Meacham -- this "first born son" -- and had made special preparations for his reception. With James Whittaker acting as Mother Ann's spokesman, the challenges and piercing questions Meacham leveled at the Shaker Ministry were calmly answered. Ann foretold that Meacham would be a "foundation pillar" responsible for the future leadership and gathering the Shaker church into order.⁴⁹ He was one of the first and most important American converts.

Opening the Gospel

On May 19, 1780, a day so darkly overcast that it was thereafter referred to as the "dark day," James Whittaker preached the first "publick [sic] testimony of the gospel in America" at Watervliet; the "opening of the gospel" had begun. Others in Meacham's family also "embraced the gospel": his wife, children, father, and "many of his kindred," including his brother David.⁵⁰

Curious on-lookers and serious seekers now reportedly found their way to the quiet wilderness settlement at Watervliet. All were welcomed; a few stayed. The

⁴⁹[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Prudence Hammond, *Testimonies*, p. 22.

⁵⁰Johnson, "Biographical Account," pp. 26-27. David Meacham of Enfield, Connecticut, visited the Shakers first in January 1781 and joined shortly thereafter. "David, though a wealthy and honorable man in the world, became a faithful and bold soldier in the gospel and was afterwards, for many years, the first Deacon in the Church, and was greatly instrumental in establishing order, in temporal things throughout the Church." Another important convert, and future Elder, was John Farrington. He was about twenty years old when he visited Ann at Watervliet in May 1780. [Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Prudence Hammond, *Testimonies*, pp. 22, 25.

interviewing process for those aspiring to be Shakers centered around the evil role of lust and "the deceitful wantonness of both male and female."⁵¹ Perfection and salvation were, according to Shaker doctrine, possible only through a process of full confession of all sins, forsaking sin and all those who sinned, and spiritual separation from the outside world. To associate with the world was to invite spiritual corruption.⁵²

Shaker Temporal Order

Freedom from debt was one of the most important elements of temporal order and was crucial to joining the Church. In *Testimonies* Eliab Harlow recalled Mother Ann exhorting the evils of debt: "You will . . . not only bring yourself into bondage, but your family also, and bring distress upon your creditors. Such evil management will forever be a loss to the soul, till the creditors are paid, and the soul finds repentance."⁵³ When Cornelius Goodale visited Ann at Watervliet in January of 1784, asking advice on whether to sell his farm and buy a less expensive one in order to pay his debts, Ann answered: "You better not. The people of God do not sell their farms to pay their debts; but they put their hands to work, and gather something by their industry, to pay their debts with, and keep their farms."⁵⁴

⁵¹Brown, *Account*, p. 73.

⁵²[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 17-18, 245, 248.

⁵³[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Eliab Harlow, *Testimonies*, p. 268.

⁵⁴[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Cornelius Goodale, *Testimonies*, p. 267.

Temporal economy was also the theme of many conversations between Ann, the elders and the church members.

They were taught to be industrious, to put their hands to work, and their hearts to God; to be neat and cleanly, and observe good economy; to use the things of this world as not abusing them; to be prudent and saving, and not let nothing be lost or wasted through carelessness or neglect [sic]; to avoid covetousness and prodigality. . . . those that were unfaithful in temporal things, could not find the blessing protection of God, in their spiritual travel.⁵⁵

New converts visiting Mother Ann at Ashfield were exhorted to "Go home, and take good care of what you have. Provide places for your things so that you may know where to find them at any time, by day or night; and learn to be neat and clean, prudent and saving, and see that nothing is lost."⁵⁶

Shaker narratives recount that Ann also frequently warned against "superfluities" -- in dress and in life. Mother gave Phebe Spencer advice about "gold beads, jewels, silver buckles and other ornaments of the kind":

You may let the moles and bats have them, that is, the children of this world; for they set their hearts upon such things; but the people of God do not want them. . . . You ought to dress yourself in modest apparel [sic], as become the people of God, and teach your family to do likewise. You ought to be industrious and prudent, and not live a sumptuous and gluttonous life.⁵⁷

Speaking about temporal economy in the Massachusetts town of Petersham during the summer of 1783, Ann admonished the heads of families "against their costly and extravagant furniture": "Never put on silver spoons nor table-cloths . . . but let your

⁵⁵[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 263.

⁵⁶[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Jacob Hunt, *Testimonies*, p. 267.

⁵⁷[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Phebe Spencer, *Testimonies*, p. 265.

tables be clean enough to eat on without cloths; and if you do not know what to do with them, give them to the poor."⁵⁸

Prudence went hand-in-hand with temporal economy. Believers were instructed to pick bones clean, do their wash on Monday to "set a good example before the world," and be "saving of every temporal blessing" as though they "had labored for it" with their own hands. "It is a sin to waste . . . any thing . . . that God has give you," Mother intoned.⁵⁹ Temporal economy also applied to farming; Elder James Whittaker advised men to "Cut your grain clean; God has caused it to grow, and you ought to be careful to save it; for you cannot make one kernel grow, if you know you must starve for want of it."⁶⁰

Cleanliness was as essential as prudence. As reported in *Testimonies*, Mother Ann counseled Lucy Prescott to "Clean your room well; for good spirits will not live when there is dirt. There is no dirt in heaven. . . . You ought to be neat and clean; for there [are] no slovens nor sluts in heaven." And to Zeruah Clark, Ann said, "Be faithful to keep the gospel; be neat and industrious; keep your family's clothes clean and decent; see that your house is kept clean and decent."⁶¹

Shaker accounts also state that Mother Ann emphasized kindness and charity.

⁵⁸[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of John Robinson, *Testimonies*, p. 267.

⁵⁹[Bishop and Wells], Testimonies of Jacob Health, Jacob Hunt, Lydia Mathewson, and Rebecca Slosson, *Testimonies*, pp. 267, 270, 288.

⁶⁰[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 264.

⁶¹[Bishop and Wells], Testimonies of Lucy Prescott and Zeruah Clark, *Testimonies*, pp. 263, 265.

"You must be kind to strangers, as I have been kind to you," she said, "for that is the only way that you can reward me."⁶² "Be kind and charitable to the poor," Ann admonished, and be "faithful with your hands, that you may have something to give to the poor."

"You must remember the poor and needy, the widow and the fatherless; and deal out your bread to the hungry and your clothes to the naked." "Remember the cries of those who are in need and trouble, that when you are in trouble, God will hear your cries."⁶³

Conduct in human relationships was also part of the "order" established by the sect. When two women who were arguing with each other brought the conflict to Mother Ann in the autumn of 1783, *Testimonies* recounts that she told them:

You are both wicked women -- you are both in the wrong. Humble yourselves before God, and put away your wrongs, or you cannot be saved. And instead of your hard feelings, make confessions to each other, for God will not accept you in any other way -- He will not love you except you love one another.⁶⁴

In speaking to Lucy Wright, Mother Ann reiterated the same theme: "You can never enter the Kingdom of God with hardness against anyone: for God is love: and if you love God, you will love one another." Father William echoed the same advice, coupling it with repentance and faithfulness. "Be obedient," he said, "and never give offense to any, nor take offense at any one."⁶⁵ "You ought to love one another, and never have one

⁶²[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Ruth Turner, *Testimonies*, p. 310.

⁶³[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 263; Testimonies of Cornelius Thayer, Phebe Spencer, and Anne Cogswell, pp. 269, 265.

⁶⁴[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Morrell Baker, *Testimonies*, p. 283.

⁶⁵[Bishop and Wells], Testimonies of Lucy Wright and Deborah Willimas, *Testimonies*, pp. 281, 293.

hard feeling towards the other, but live together, every day, as though it was the last you had to live in this world, and never forget one another."⁶⁶ Such counsel extended to wives. "Watch and be careful, don't speak harsh, not cast reflections upon them [husbands and brethren], but let your words be few and seasoned with grace," Ann told Zeruah Clark.⁶⁷

Obedience was an essential part of temporal and spiritual order. Mother and the elders firmly believed it was their calling to instruct young Believers "in the things of God and in the path of their duty." In giving counsel, "they were careful to impress upon the people, the absolute necessity of strict and perfect obedience, in order that they might profit by their privilege, and find justification before God."⁶⁸

Communal Living

The communal living now associated with the Shakers did not develop under Mother Ann, partially because the Watervliet settlement could not physically expand rapidly enough to feed and house all the new converts, and because the Society members believed they had not yet received the spiritual gift to "progress into order." During 1780 and 1781, converts were usually sent home to settle all their debts and to allow the Biblical teachings of the gospel to transform their lives. Advice like that given to Ruth

⁶⁶[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Hannah Cogswell, *Testimonies*, p. 273.

⁶⁷[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Zeruah Clark, *Testimonies*, p. 263.

⁶⁸[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Ephriam Welch, *Testimonies*, p. 292; see also the Testimony of Deborah Williams, p. 293.

Turner by Mother Ann was common: "Go home, and set your house in order."⁶⁹ To others she simply said, "Go home, and put your hands to work and your hearts to God."⁷⁰ Until all financial ties with the world had been severed, new members were forbidden to move to the Niskeyuna settlement. Most converts continued to live with their wives and children in their communities.⁷¹

Often asked about marriage, Mother Ann and the elders were quick to point out that celibacy was considered a gift given only to the few. One story states that Daniel Mosely and others gathered at Watervliet were told:

Do not go away and report that we forbid to marry; for unless you are able to take up a full cross, and part with every gratification of the flesh, for the Kingdom of God, I would counsel you, and all such, to take wives in a lawful manner, and cleave to them only; and raise up a lawful posterity, and be perpetual servants to your families: of all lustful gratifications that is the least sin.⁷²

Such advice, however, did not change the goal or ideal -- which always remained living in communal celibacy. Speaking to a group of married people shortly after opening the gospel at Watervliet in 1780, Mother Ann stressed why this "full cross" was necessary: "You must forsake the marriage of flesh, and travel out of it, in order to be married to the Lamb; which is, to be married to Christ, or joined to the Lord in one spirit." Stated even more strongly, Ann warned Believers that "The marriage of flesh is a

⁶⁹[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Ruth Turner, *Testimonies*, p. 310.

⁷⁰[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 264.

⁷¹See, for example, the Testimonies of Zerach Clark and Cornelius Goodale in [Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 263, 267.

⁷²[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Daniel Mosely, *Testimonies*, p. 296.

covenant with death, and an agreement with hell."⁷³

Controversy and Conflict

In America as in England, the Shakers seemingly stirred up controversy and often provoked conflict with their testimonies.⁷⁴ Shortly after opening the gospel in the spring of 1780, Shaker histories report that the countryside around the Niskeyuna settlement was filled "with anxiety and alarm"; a "common fame had already branded them with witchcraft, and all manner of evil."⁷⁵ Americans were still engaged in a bitter war with England and the loyalty of the Shakers to the American cause came under fire for several reasons. Because the Shaker leaders were English, they were suspected of being Tories; being pacifists only fueled these suspicions more. The Army provision conscriptionists who foraged the area for food and supplies for the starving colonial troops found the Shakers could donate very little from their already depleted stores, which only magnified the expanding distrust. Isolating themselves from the larger society added to the resentment. Celibacy, as preached by the Shakers, struck at the very foundation of American family life; this concept more than any other Shaker belief may have underscored the fear, resentment, and abuse focused against the sect. As tensions mounted, Ann and the Shaker leaders were imprisoned once again, this time in Albany

⁷³[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies of Lucy Wright and Jonathan Slosson*, *Testimonies*, pp. 285, 305.

⁷⁴[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 69-81.

⁷⁵[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 15; Testimony of Asa Allan, *Testimonies*, p. 38.

for being enemies of the country.

Testimonies reports that the first act of persecution occurred in July 1780.⁷⁶

David Darrow, Joseph Meacham, and John Hocknell were the first Believers arrested for treason; soon after followed the apprehension of Hezekiah Hammond and Joel Pratt.

Mother Ann and Elders William and James were also ordered to Albany on charges of being enemies of the country, with Ann later being moved to the prison in Poughkeepsie.

Samual Johnson was then seized in a public meeting.⁷⁷

Ann apparently preached from the prison windows, drawing great crowds and publicity. This public notice served only to emphasize the inconsistency between jailing individuals for their religious beliefs while fighting a revolution to secure individual rights and the freedom from persecution. The public sympathy seemed to be with the Believers on this occasion. In November, David Darrow was "released on parole at the intercession of his father-in-law"; this was followed by the release on December 20th of the elders and all those imprisoned with them at Albany, without ever having a formal trial. Upon his own release, Joseph Meacham petitioned Governor Clinton directly for Mother Ann's release, which occurred "about the last day of December " after an imprisonment of almost five months.⁷⁸

Conversions to the Shaker faith greatly increased during the winter and spring of

⁷⁶[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 70.

⁷⁷[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 70-72. Calvin Harlow asked to accompany Mother Ann; Mary Partington also went with her as a female companion.

⁷⁸[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 79-80; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 14.

1781.⁷⁹ Ann sought to capitalize on the favorable climate of religious renewal with a two year tour throughout New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut to spread the word and way of salvation. "She left here the last day of May, about sunset, accompanied by Elder William, Elder James, Samuel Fitch, Mary Partington, and Margaret Leeland."⁸⁰

The religious fervor of these last years had left a splintered and often hostile Congregational church in its wake. Many Americans were financially and emotionally drained by the religious and political upheavals of the past decades and were intolerant of another apostle advocating a further deviation from the accepted Protestant norm. The Shakers' reception in the small towns of these New England states was sometimes cordial, but more often bitterly opposed. Local centers of faith were built, especially at Harvard and Shirley, Massachusetts, but not without creating equal whirlpools of hatred and persecution.

The spread of Shakerism with its ideals of perfection, celibacy, and communism brought harassment, physical brutality, and deep resentment. People were outraged by an ideology that espoused celibacy and the full equality of men and women. These ideas threatened to break up families and society, neither of which recognized anything

⁷⁹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 81-82.

⁸⁰[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 82-83; F. W. Evans, *Compendium of the Origin, History, Principles, Rules and Regulations, Government, and Doctrines of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing* (New York, NY: Appleton and Company, 1859), pp. 141-144; Testimony of Eliab Harlow in Seth Y. Wells and Calvin Green, *Testimonies Concerning the Character and Ministry of Mother Ann Lee and the First Witnesses of the Gospel of Christ's Second Appearing* (Albany NY: Parkard & Van Benthuysen, 1827), p. 20; Margo Mayo, "The Incredible Journey of Mother Ann," *The Shaker Quarterly* 2, 1 (Spring 1962), pp. 42-52.

approaching a legal autonomy of women.⁸¹ Beatings, accusations of witchcraft, harlotry and drunkenness, and continual indignities and cruelties followed Ann and the other Believers, as described in the following Shaker account:

. . . they suffered much personal abuse, and on several occasions, they were so shamefully and cruelly abused, particularly at Harvard and Petersham, that, to all human appearance, it seemed as tho' nothing short of Divine Power could have preserved their lives. The people also, who embraced the testimony, often suffered a large share in these abuses; being scourged with whips, beaten with clubs, stoned, kicked and dragged about by their legs and arms, and sometimes by the hair of their heads, and driven from place to place, in the most cruel and abusive manner; so that many of them but narrowly escaped with their lives . . .⁸²

A Shaker historical account of a final act of violence apparently hastened the end of Ann Lee's life. A New Lebanon mob incensed by the Shaker teachings tied Mother Ann by her heels behind a wagon and dragged her over an icy road for several miles.⁸³ She survived this incident but returned to Watervliet in September, 1783, physically and spiritually exhausted.

Shortly before her death, Ann reportedly prophesied an end to the persecutions. "You will see peaceable times," she said to Elizabeth Chase; "then you may worship God under your own vines and fig trees, and none of the wicked will make you afraid." Eight years later, the prophesy was fulfilled "and the Believers worshiped God, in their appointed habitations, unmolested by the wicked, and under that measure of the gospel

⁸¹Whitson, *Two Centuries*, p. 15.

⁸²[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 22.

⁸³[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 22.

which each one had treasured up in his own soul."⁸⁴

Safe again among her family of Believers, Ann and William counseled and encouraged the many Shakers who came to visit. The powerful meetings continued to harvest many souls awakened by the gospel, and "the purifying fire of Zion."⁸⁵

But Shaker historians suggest that the physical abuse both experienced on their journeys took its toll. "On the 21st of July 1784, about six o'clock in the afternoon, in the 41st year of his age" the beloved and devoted Father William, who had faithfully led and inspired Shakers over the last two decades, died. At his funeral on the 23rd,

Father James and Elder Calvin addressed the assembly, and spoke of his faithfulness: that he had been faithful to bear and suffer for the increase of the gospel, and that he had finished his work, and given up his life in sufferings. . . . He has been the most violent man against sin that even my eyes beheld, and if such a one is not saved, I do not know who can be.⁸⁶

Both William and Ann had labored incessantly, expending passionate energy to bring salvation to others. His death evidently devastated Ann. Emotionally fragile, but even more strongly committed to God and the gathering of Believers, Ann slowly deteriorated physically. In preparing the Believers for her death, "she repeatedly warned them to be faithful" to their Shaker beliefs and to each other.

Lucy Wright stayed with Mother Ann at Watervliet during her last days. Three days before her death, *Testimonies* recounts that Ann prophesied about the future of the

⁸⁴[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies of Elizabeth Chase and Morrell Baker*, *Testimonies*, pp. 220-221.

⁸⁵[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 22. The suggested age of 41 at his death is somewhat questionable, as he was born about 1740.

⁸⁶[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 341-342.

Society:

I shall soon be taken out of this body; but the gospel will never be taken away from you, if you are faithful. Be not discouraged, not cast down; for God will not leave his people without a Lead. Elder James and Elder Joseph will be left, and there will be an increase of the gifts of God, to all who are faithful and obedient.⁸⁷

Shaker stories record that during her last days, she repeatedly said to those around her that she was "going home," and on the "eighth of September, between twelve and one o'clock in the morning," Ann Lee "breathed her last, without a struggle or a groan." In the remaining moments before she died, she apparently had her last vision: "I see Brother William coming, in a golden chariot, to take me home."⁸⁸

The New England mission that had contributed to her demise did accomplish what Ann had passionately wanted -- spreading the word and way of salvation. The foundations were laid for future communities in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Leadership now fell to the remaining member of the First Ministry, James Whittaker.

The loss of both Mother Ann and Father William severely shook the faith of many Believers. As Mother Ann had predicted -- "grievous wolves . . . will destroy many of the flock" -- many lost faith completely and left.⁸⁹ Many more questioned the immortality of their leaders and consequently their beliefs. All grieved the passing of their charismatic and loving Mother who had given so much and taken so little. Her

⁸⁷[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Job Bishop, *Testimonies*, p. 235.

⁸⁸[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 351. In May 1835, the remains of William and Ann were relocated "by the side of Mother Lucy's grave in the center of the grave yard." Philemon Stewart, *Daily Journal* (No. 3) (New Lebanon, NY, 1834-1836), WRHS V B 130, May 28, 1835.

⁸⁹[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Morrell Baker, *Testimonies*, p. 218.

teachings, as had her life, brought the remaining members closer together.⁹⁰ James Whittaker, the only one now left of those who had come from England, was "ordained of God" to follow Mother Ann in leadership.⁹¹ Ann had predicted "the time will come when the Church will be gathered into order; but not till after my decease." Father James now assumed the work of gathering together the scattered groups of faithful Believers.⁹²

James Whittaker's Leadership

The "tripartite" leadership of Mother Ann, Father William, and James Whittaker provided Whittaker "the experience, a substantial measure of public recognition, and the widespread respect" to support his leadership. While John Hocknell sanctioned Whittaker's role, the other remaining English Shakers did not;

⁹⁰Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 45.

⁹¹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 353.

⁹²[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 218, 353-380. They survived the early years of obstacles and cruelties, and grew into nineteen communities from Maine to Kentucky with a collective membership of 3608 in 1840. William Sims Bainbridge, "Shaker Demographics 1840-1900: An Example of the Use of U. S. Census Enumeration Schedules," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 21, 4 (1982), pp. 352-365. This number includes white members only; 19 "free colored persons" were members in six villages, mostly South Union, Kentucky. Major Shaker villages were located in eight states: Maine: Sabbathday Lake (1793-active) and Alfred (1783-1931); New Hampshire: Enfield (1793-1918) and Canterbury (1792-1992); Massachusetts: Harvard (1791-1919), Shirley (1793-1909), Hancock (1790-1960), and Tyringham (1792-1875); New York: New Lebanon (1787-1947), Watervliet (1787-1938), and Groveland (1836-1892); Ohio: Union Village (1812-1910), Watervliet (1824-1907), and Whitewater (1824-1907); Indiana: West Union (Busro) (1810-1827); and Kentucky: Pleasant Hill (1814-1910) and South Union (1811-1922). Short-lived villages were also located in: White Oak, Georgia and Narcoossee, Florida.

James Shepard, Richard Hocknell, and James Partington left the Society.⁹³

After Ann's death, James Whittaker was responsible for moving the center of Shakerism from Watervliet to New Lebanon, possibly to be closer to those of authority in the Shaker hierarchy, such as Meacham and Calvin Harlow.⁹⁴ Samuel Ellis stated that the peculiar gift of Whittaker's ministry was "to wean the affections of the believers from their natural and earthly ties, and prepare them for a spiritual relation in church order."⁹⁵

At Ashfield in 1782-1783, Elder James spoke to this:

The time was come for you to give up yourselves and your all to God -- your substance, your temporal property -- to possess as though you possessed not -- The time has been that you have been fed with milk; but the time is now come to be fed with meat.⁹⁶

Whittaker continuously counseled elders -- Joseph Meacham and others -- relative to "gathering, building and establishing the Church in gospel order" and he "likened to the

⁹³According to Stein, Whittaker was ideally suited for this transition to leadership: "He was one of the original English witnesses and had been a faithful disciple of Ann Lee from the beginning. . . . He had established his credentials within the Society by playing a major role in the missionary journey through New England, by standing with Ann Lee and William Lee at the head of the sect, and by suffering with them in times of hardship." Also, Whittaker was one of the few in the Society who was literate and read from the Bible during the worship services. *Shaker Experience*, p. 33. Partington's daughter Mary remained with the Shakers. [Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 379.

⁹⁴Calvin Harlow and Meacham joined the Shakers at the same time and were close friends. Ann said of Calvin: "Calvin Harlow will be a minister of the gospel to other souls. . . . Calvin is an Elder. O the bright glories I see for Calvin! I see him stand with his people, like a bishop, ministering the gifts of God." This prophecy was fulfilled; Calvin remained at New Lebanon until he was "called, by a special gift of God . . . to take charge of the people in Hancock and Pittsfield." He gathered Shakers in this region into the Church at Hancock, where he served as first Elder and Father until his death. [Bishop and Wells], *Testimony of Elizur Goodrich*, *Testimonies*, pp. 218-219.

⁹⁵[Bishop and Wells], *Testimony of Samuel Ellis*, *Testimonies*, p. 282.

⁹⁶[Bishop and Wells], *Testimony of Samuel Ellis*, *Testimonies*, p. 282.

instructions of David to Solomon, concerning the building of the temple."⁹⁷

A man of great vision, Father James prophesied "there will be a vast increase; but it will come thro' [sic] an increase of union, and in no other way." The structure he designed for the Society -- the structure that Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright would institute -- came from a vision he had shortly before his death: "I saw all the Believers travel, and then come to a step, as up against a wall; and then they were brought into order." Records describe that Whittaker also realized the fundamental need to systematically unite the scattered converts to prevent disorder and apostasy. In addition, he greatly restricted missionary activities, warned of abuse and remonstrances by friends and relatives, and stressed the need for converts to sever all affective ties with non-Shakers.⁹⁸

When James Whittaker succeeded Ann, the Shakers claimed about one thousand associates, mostly scattered on individual farms and throughout many small communities of New England and New York.⁹⁹ Father James, in his role of gathering the church into order, withdrew the Shaker testimony from the world and devoted his time to

⁹⁷[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, pp. 377-378; [Green and Wells], *Summary View*, pp. 55-56.

⁹⁸Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, p. 17.

⁹⁹Stephen Paterwic, "From Individual to Community: Becoming a Shaker at New Lebanon 1780-1947," *Communal Societies*, 11 (1991), p. 20. At this time, those interested in the Shakers would often visit the elders at Niskeyuna. Conversion, when it followed, consisted of confessing one's sins and "opening of the mind." New converts returned to their families scattered throughout New England and New York. Spiritual "transformation" did little to change the outward appearance of their lives: "they still resided on home farms and carried on the usual agricultural occupations and related trades" common to most rural residents. The most notable change Shakerism wrought in converts' lives was the absence of sexual relations between spouses -- they now lived "as brothers and sisters."

consolidating the preceding work and uniting the associates into communities. During the three years of Whittaker's leadership, the spiritual and organizational center was shifted from Niskeyuna to New Lebanon, both in New York, but the latter near the Massachusetts border and closer to the majority of the converts gathered during Mother Ann's mission.¹⁰⁰ Standing as a visible symbol of a faith established, the first Shaker meeting house was "raised" at New Lebanon on October 15, 1785, and completed early in 1786.¹⁰¹ The central location of the meeting house served perhaps both physical and symbolic functions: it was convenient for worship and it was a continual reminder of the centering role of religion in Shaker life. Father James preached there for the first regular Sabbath assembly on January 29th, saying:

When you go in and out at these doors, remember to go in and out in the fear of God. Remember that this house was build to repent and serve God in; that God has placed his foundation here, for all souls to gather to, that ever find salvation.¹⁰²

Whittaker also continued the missionary work of his predecessors, traveling to Maine and New Hampshire in 1786. Four Shaker communities trace their establishment to Whittaker's mission: Canterbury and Enfield in New Hampshire, and Alfred and Sabbathday Lake in Maine.

By the turn of the new year, however, Whittaker's health weakened and he returned to New Lebanon. As his condition worsened, he sought rest at the Meacham

¹⁰⁰Paterwic, "Individual to Community," pp. 20-21. The "largest single group" of converts "lived in the northern portion of Canaan, New York. These were the first New Lebanon Shakers."

¹⁰¹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 373; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 34.

¹⁰²[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 373.

family home in Enfield, Connecticut. During a brief period of recovery in March, he visited the Believers in Harvard, Shirley, and Woburn, Massachusetts, but was forced to return prematurely to Enfield as his health again deteriorated. Whittaker died on the 20th of July, 1787, and was buried the next day. Believers deeply mourned his loss, viewing Father Joseph as "the last of those faithful Ministers of Christ, who had brought the gospel to this land, and had been called to stand in the Ministry."¹⁰³

Whittaker's short leadership proved to be an interregnum between the purely charismatic authority of Mother Ann and the extensive routinization and regulation that would take effect under the leadership of Joseph Meacham.¹⁰⁴ As such, he provided the foundation upon which Meacham would build the spiritual and temporal gifts of the Society into a structured gospel order.¹⁰⁵

The Second Generation Leaders

Joseph Meacham

"Be of Good comfort," Mother Ann said before she died; "cleave to Elder Joseph; for he will be your Father and will take care of you." At the critical stage of transition

¹⁰³[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 379. Elder John Hocknell, well over seventy when he came with the Shakers to America, died at Watervliet on February, 27, 1779, about two years after the death of his wife Hannah.

¹⁰⁴H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1946).

¹⁰⁵Stein summarizes this early period of Shaker history as one in which "the founders planted seeds that would take root in subsequent years. . . . As of 1787, however, their religious ideas were unsystemized, their social relations unorganized, their worship unstructured, and their activities together rather informal." *Shaker Experience*, p. 38.

from English to American leadership, Joseph Meacham brought direction and union into the disjointed Shaker Society. Meacham's monumental mission was to gather the thousand scattered and disillusioned associates into a coherent system of family communities.¹⁰⁶ Shortly after Meacham "embraced the gospel," Mother Ann spoke eloquently of his future spiritual and organizational role in the Society:

Joseph Meacham is the wisest man that has been born of a woman for six hundred years. God has called and anointed him to be a Father to all his people in America. . . . It will not be my lot, not the lot of any that came with me from England, to gather and build up the Church; but it will be the lot of Joseph Meacham, and others, to gather the Church.¹⁰⁷

One of the first converts after opening the gospel in 1780, Meacham was born on February 11, 1742, into a wealthy Enfield, Connecticut, family. His father was the founder of the Baptist church in Enfield, and held a position of honor in the community. From the teachings and sermons of his father, Joseph was instilled with the liberalism of the New Lights. With his wife and sons, he earned his living as a yeoman farmer and

¹⁰⁶[Bishop and Wells], Testimonies of Job Bishop and James Whittaker, *Testimonies*, pp. 235, 219. This was one of Mother Ann's prophecies during her mission into New England during the spring of 1782. According to Andrews, without the influence of Joseph Meacham, the Shakers would probably not have survived the death of Ann Lee, or merited more than a footnote in the social, economic or religious history of America (*Shakers*, p. 54). For a thorough discussion of Meacham's role in Shakerism as a "enduring American religious institution," see Elizabeth Anne Cunicelli, *'Under Your Own Vine and Fig Trees': A Study of Joseph Meacham and the Indigenization of Millennialist, Perfectionist and Utopian Themes in Shaker Religion* (Fordham University, NY: unpublished dissertation, 1993). Cunicelli states that "Meacham's involvement in the Shaker endeavor assured its acceptance and successful insertion into the American religious and cultural scene. . . . Shakerism attained long-lived success as a utopian enterprise primarily because of the American theological and cultural heritage Meacham brought to bear on the endeavor" (pp. 3-4). See also Evans, *Compendium*, pp. 177, 184; Elmer R. Pearson and Julia Neal, *The Shaker Image* (Boston, MA: New York Graphic Society; Hancock, MA: Shaker Community, Inc., 1974), pp. 29-30; June Sprigg and David Larson, *Shaker Life, Work, and Art* (New York, NY: Stuart Tabori & Chang, 1991), pp. 22-23; Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, pp. 17, 24, 63.

¹⁰⁷[Bishop and Wells], Testimonies of Elizur Goodrich and Sarah Bennet, *Testimonies*, pp. 218-219.

became the leading Baptist lay preacher in New Lebanon, New York.¹⁰⁸

Little mention is made of Meacham during the years from his Shaker conversion to his assumption of leadership after the death of James Whittaker in 1787. He did not accompany the Shaker elders on the 1781-1783 mission throughout New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, but was "called on to visit and labor with Believers for their protection."¹⁰⁹ Meacham achieved a position of quiet leadership among the Shakers of New Lebanon while the Elders and Mother Ann were on their mission. *Summary View* credits both Meacham and Lucy Wright with being "eminently useful during Father James's ministry . . . [having] ably supported him in protecting, strengthening and encouraging the people, and preparing them for the increasing work which was to follow."¹¹⁰

After Father James' death, Elders Calvin Harlow, David Meacham, and Joseph Meacham led "jointly. . . and it was hardly known which of the three were first in the Lead; But the faith of most Believers centered more in Elder Joseph than in either of the others." Elder Joseph now became Father Joseph.¹¹¹

Shaker Calvin Green reported that Mother Ann said "Meacham is my first born

¹⁰⁸Johnson, "Biographical Account," pp. 22-23.

¹⁰⁹Johnson, "Biographical Account," p. 27.

¹¹⁰[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 31.

¹¹¹Johnson, "Biographical Account." pp. 28-29.

son in America. He will gather the Church into Order."¹¹² Thus, he began the work of transforming Mother's vision into reality. The attainment of the union of faith that had been the principal mission under Mother Ann and Father Whittaker now began to take place under the ministrations of Father Joseph.¹¹³

Lucy Wright

One of the first organizational decisions made by Father Joseph in 1787 was to form a dual order of leadership, based on the Shaker belief of equality of the sexes, by appointing Lucy Wright to lead with him.¹¹⁴ As he had been given the "gift" of leadership, he also "brot [sic] forward the gift that the Order of Mother in Church relation

¹¹²Calvin Green, *Biographic Memoir of the Life, Character, & Important Events, in the Ministration of Mother Lucy Wright* (New Lebanon, NY, 1861), WRHS VI B 27, p. 11. Green wrote this "hagiographical account" thirty years after Meacham's death as one means of recovering a disappearing past. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 42.

¹¹³Stein summarizes Meacham's contributions and accomplishments as "practical: gathering the scattered converts into settlements, building physical structures for their life together, arranging the system of government for the community . . . establishing rules and regulations" and contributed to "the development of a distinctive Shaker religious outlook and worship pattern." *Shaker Experience*, p. 43.

¹¹⁴For a discussion on the ambivalence about the legitimacy of female leaders, see Jean M. Humez, "'Weary of Petticoat Government': The Specter of Female Rule in Early Nineteenth Century Shaker Politics," *Communal Societies*, 11 (1991), pp. 1-17. Mercadante's research suggests that the Shakers "neither conform to nor confirm some of our modern theories about a gender-inclusive imagery of God." These "discordant notes" are especially notable: "First, historical evidence shows that Shaker gender inclusive imagery for God did not come at the beginning of their history or function as keynote; second, there famed gender equity . . . reveals serious flaws on both the theological and practical levels . . . and finally, a study of Shaker materials suggests that Shaker believers actual use of female imagery for God in their personal expressions of faith was uneven and sporadic." Linda A. Mercadante, *Gender, Doctrine, & God: The Shakers and Contemporary Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), pp. 15-16.

was revealed to him, & that Lucy Wright was the female prepared for that Lot."¹¹⁵

Lucy Wright was considered first among those Sisters that had been gathered into the meeting House as assistants & Messengers. But she was now called & chosen by Revelation, & by the general union of the Church to be the first Mother in the relation & order of the first organized Church of Christ's Second Appearing, thus to stand in correspondent relation with the First Father therof [sic].¹¹⁶

Like Meacham, Wright was born into a well-to-do Pittsfield, Massachusetts, family on February 5, 1760. Very intelligent and somewhat independent, Lucy received "an uncommon education for these times. She was an excellent reader; a good writer, & grammatical composer, & few exceeded her as a judge of propriety & correct style in composition." At nineteen, she married Elizur Goodrich.¹¹⁷ Elizur joined the Shakers in a "zealous" conversion during his first visit to Mother Ann in Niskeyuna early in the summer of 1780, but "Lucy was of a cautious & considerate turn, & unwilling to embrace any profession or principle until she was convinced that these led to virtue & usefulness." Concerned about Lucy's reticence, however, Elizur sought Mother Ann's counsel, because "it was very doubtful to him whether she would believe and obey the gospel." In response, Mother Ann told him to "Take faith; Lucy may be gained to the gospel; and if you gain her, it will be equal to gaining a nation."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, pp. 14-15. See also Frances A. Carr, "Lucy Wright: The First Mother in the Revelation and Order of the First Organized Church," *The Shaker Quarterly* 15, 3 & 4 (Fall & Winter 1987), pp. 93-100, 128-132.

¹¹⁶Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, p. 15.

¹¹⁷Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁸Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, p. 7; [Bishop and Wells], *Testimony of Elizur Goodrich, Testimonies*, pp. 222-223.

Wright apparently did have some allegiance towards the sect and especially toward Mother Ann. She is mentioned in early Shaker accounts as sending gifts to Mother Ann during the Poughkeepsie imprisonment of 1780 and "attending her during the trying days at Harvard."¹¹⁹

By 1781 Wright was firmly committed to the Shaker way and moved to Watervliet at the request of Mother Ann who "placed her in charge of the leading care among the Sisters, & first Counsellor in their business."¹²⁰ Returning from her missionary journey in 1783, Ann was impressed with Lucy's successful organization of temporal affairs and "commended Lucy Wright as an example for all Believer Sisters to pattern after." During Mother Ann's last days, "she called for Lucy & desired her to remain her Caretaker while she lived."¹²¹

After Ann's death, the members of Watervliet saw clearly that much of Mother Ann's mission would be passed on to Lucy Wright. She continued to live at Watervliet as the primary "Caretaker among the Sisters" for the duration of Father James ministration,

¹¹⁹[Bishop and Wells], *Testimonies*, p. 76; Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 56.

¹²⁰Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, p. 9. Elizur and Lucy had no children and believed they had been "called to . . . a far higher Order than the marriage relation of the world." Although they continued to live for a time on their farm, they dissolved their marriage and Lucy resumed her maiden name. "But in obedience to the Gospel call, they soon voluntarily sold their possessions, & devoted themselves & and all their property to support the Cause they had embraced. Henceforth they were free to go & labor whenever duty required." Elizur "labored" and traveled among the Believers, living mostly at Watervliet until the Church was gathered at New Lebanon (p. 3). Although he did play a prominent role in organizing the Hancock and New Lebanon societies, Elizur was never to achieve the same high position of leadership as Lucy. He remained very committed to the Shakers until his death at age 61 in the Second Order at New Lebanon on February 2, 1812 (p. 7).

¹²¹Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, p. 9.

traveling as needed "to counsel and help the Sisters" of other Shaker communities.¹²²

A four member, self-perpetuating Lead Ministry was the supreme authority in the Shaker Society. In 1787, Henry Clough and Rebecca Kendal were elevated to serve as second in command to Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright.¹²³ This arrangement recognized the doctrine of duality of the Godhead, that God was both male and female, and that Christ, as a superior spirit, had appeared in both Jesus, the male, and Ann, the female.¹²⁴

Gathering Into Communal Order

In September 1787, Mother Lucy and Father Joseph called for all who were prepared to separate themselves from the world to gather together at New Lebanon. David Darrow, John Bishop, Hezekiah Hammond, Jonathan Walker, and others had donated the farm land and buildings for this community; ready Believers settled into the meager variety of cabins, barns, and houses. The Christmas meal of 1787 marked the beginning of Shaker communism as an institution.¹²⁵ Early in 1788, Lucy moved to the

¹²²Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, p. 9.

¹²³Henry Clough was a former New Light or Free-Will Baptist until joining the Shakers. He became part of a "traveling Ministry" that was commissioned "to visit the Believers in those places where they were gathering into order, to minister the gospel to them & assist them in their spiritual travel." Calvin Green, *Biography of Elder Henry Clough* (New Lebanon, NY, 1860), WRHS VI B 24, pp. 23-24.

¹²⁴Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Work and Worship Among the Shakers: Their Craftsmanship and Economic Order* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1974), p. 24.

¹²⁵Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 56; Pearson and Neal, *Shaker Image*, pp. 29-30; Sprigg and Larson, *Shaker Life*, p. 23.

New Lebanon meeting house, thus uniting the leadership.¹²⁶

Meacham organized the Believers into three courts or orders based on the dedication, faith, and material circumstances of each individual. The inner court or "first gathering of the Church," was for those most prepared to separate from the world.¹²⁷ This court was for Shakers who had no ties, either financial or marital, to the world. They gave freely and forever of all they possessed.

The second order was for those members "whose circumstances did not, at that time, admit of so complete a separation from the world, being still under more or less embarrassments, or entanglements with those without."¹²⁸ Entanglements usually consisted of unbelieving children, spouses, or heirs that had a rightful inheritance to temporal interests. The Shakers fully recognized these familial claims and would not accept members into the inner court until settlements had been made to the satisfaction of all involved.

The second order consisted mostly of young men and women, and a few children by parental consent. Gathered into a separate order with subordinate privileges, they were nonetheless encouraged to join the united interest of the church as quickly as

¹²⁶Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, p. 9.

¹²⁷[Rufus Bishop], *A Collection of the Writings of Father Joseph Meacham Respecting Church Order and Government* (New Lebanon, NY, 1850), WRHS VII B 59, p. 26. Collected by Rufus Bishop between May and September of 1850, these writings by Meacham from 1791 to sometime in 1796 are often termed "way-marks." Meacham was strongly influenced by Mother Ann and his advice and admonishments reflect this. The 1821 *Milenial* [sic] *Laws* stem chiefly from the first covenant in 1795 and the verbal and written instructions or way-marks of Meacham. See also Stein, *Shaker Adventure*, pp. 95-96.

¹²⁸[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 60.

possible. Members of this family lived celibate lives based on Shaker doctrine and could devote the use of their property to the Shakers for their mutual benefit, providing that they agreed to make no "demands upon the family for the use of the property . . . or for any services which they might perform." However, unlike converts of the inner order, members of the second order were at liberty to withdraw the property they had brought in if they later decided to leave the Church.¹²⁹

In "way-marks," Meacham described these two orders:

The greatest faith and abilities in things spiritual, of the middle aged and under, are gathered into the order of the first Court of the church. The second in their faith and abilities are the Second Court, they that are more able to be helps in the Church in temporal things. . . ¹³⁰

A third or outer order was reserved for the elderly. This court consisted of those "such as by age or infirmity, or any other cause were not able to travel with the young people."¹³¹ Meacham understood the difficulties of those who had "spent the greatest part of your days and strength in living after the course of the world" and made allowances for those who were "farther from the Kingdom than the young" having lived "longer after the flesh."¹³²

Deacons and deaconesses had charge of all business concerns, relations with the

¹²⁹[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 60.

¹³⁰[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, p. 27.

¹³¹[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, p. 27.

¹³²[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, pp. 50-51.

world, and provided for the community's needs, as well as had charge for the outer order.

David Meacham, as first deacon of the first or "church" order, and his associate Jonathan Walker, managed this outer order and the Society's temporal or business concerns.

Deacons were, in general,

to lay out the order of buildings, yards, and fences, according to their order and use . . . they are also to lay out the order of the farm, according to their understanding, for the most profitable and discretionary use, and are to judge of the use, and of the times and seasons in which things ought to be done. They are also to judge what kinds and the numbers of beast that are most profitable for the use of the Church, according to the land they occupy; and the order and manner they are to be kept used.¹³³

In his writings, Meacham gave detailed instructions to the deacons about keeping visual order in the layout of the communities: "all buildings to dwell in ought to be uniform . . . with equal apartments for both brethren and sisters," that all other buildings "be uniform with each other" and be located according to convenience, and that "all yards and fences connected with the buildings ought to be according to the order of the buildings -- their lines parallel with the lines of the buildings."¹³⁴

In business affairs, Elder David was "to oversee all out goings and incomings, relating to burying, selling, giving and receiving, in behalf of the Church" and to see that all temporal matters between the Church and the world were "done according to Church order." Meacham stipulated that as deacon, Elder David was responsible to "establish

¹³³[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, pp. 4-5.

¹³⁴[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, p. 47.

trades, or the order of trades . . . so far as relates to publick [sic] sale."¹³⁵

Meacham reinforced Mother Ann's advice about debt to the Elder David, saying that the Church should "be free from debt or any just occasion, on their part, from any demand from without." Elder David was cautioned "to receive nothing into the joint property of the Church but what is free and clear of all just claims from those who are without so that they may have no just demand on either the members or property of the Church."¹³⁶ Exact records were kept of all properties consecrated to the Church, either for ownership or for use. This was done not to denote how much one gave, but to lessen the chances of disagreement if members later left the order and wanted to reclaim their property.

In 1787 the New Lebanon community consisted of fifty-seven brethren and forty-eight sisters. In 1788, membership increased by eighty-nine and in 1789 by another forty-six members.¹³⁷ In 1788 the Believers entered into an oral covenant to stand as one joint community. ". . . they freely gave of themselves and services, with all their temporal interest, for the mutual support and benefit of each other, and for other charitable uses, according to the light and revelation of God which they had received."¹³⁸ This oral covenant was entered into only by those of the inner court or those who had

¹³⁵[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, pp. 47-48.

¹³⁶[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, p. 39.

¹³⁷Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*, pp. 24-25.

¹³⁸[Benjamin Seth Youngs], *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing* (Lebanon, OH, 1808), p. 495.

made a full and final commitment to Shaker celibacy, communism, and theology.

From 1787 to 1791, the Church consisted of the first order (Meacham's inner order plus the office portion of the outer order that regulated business transactions) and the second order (the second and outer or elderly orders combined). The first large dwelling house was built in 1788 to accommodate all the members except the Lead Ministry, who lived on the second floor of the meeting house. Recognition of the equality but separateness of the sexes was built into this dwelling house: men and women had separate entrance doors, separate staircases, separate sides of the building, and all the hallways were wide enough to allow men and women to pass each other without coming into contact. This pattern of separate but equal would be copied in all the buildings in all the communities.¹³⁹

Organization of Shaker Families

Shakers used the term "family" to denote a socioeconomic unit of Sisters and Brethren living together in the same dwelling, autonomous in their economic pursuits, and organized under the dual leadership of elders and eldresses, and deacons (trustees) and deaconesses, usually two of each. The deacons and deaconesses were initially the caretakers of the children who were located only in the second order; only adults resided

¹³⁹Ken Burns and Amy Stechler Burns, "The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God" (Public Broadcasting System, 1985).

in the first order at this time.¹⁴⁰

In 1790 Father Joseph reopened the Shaker testimony to the world -- at least partially.¹⁴¹ This opening was not marked by a two year gospel mission as Mother Ann's had been, but by the publication of the first theological writing, *A Concise Statement of the Only True Church*, which established the true millennial nature of the sect.¹⁴²

In 1791, six separate families of elderly or those not eligible for Church membership were loosely united under an "order of families." Each of the six groups was organized under some prominent leader and called by his name. Usually the members of these groups had sold their farms and possessions before merging, although the explicit concept of a united interest was not adopted until this "old Believers order" was reorganized in 1814.¹⁴³

By 1792, the New Lebanon Society consisted of the First Family, led by Elder David Darrow and Eldress Ruth Farrington, the Second Family with Elders Samuel Fitch and Elizur Goodrich and Eldresses Mary Harlow and Elizabeth Chase, and the order of families consolidated under Elder Rufus Clark and Eldress Zeruah Clark. The Lead

¹⁴⁰ Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*, p. 26.

¹⁴¹ Paterwic, "Individual to Community," p. 21.

¹⁴² Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 24-25; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, pp. 46-47. Stein suggests Meacham "influenced the formulation of the theological vision " as the "unsigned author" of this tract attempting "to substantiate the claims of the sect to be 'the only true church.'"

¹⁴³ Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 58.

Ministry were members of the First Family.¹⁴⁴

From 1790 to 1793, the New Lebanon Central Ministry appointed leaders for all the bishoprics under which the individual communities were organized. Thus, the First Bishopric consisted of New Lebanon and Watervliet and was governed by Elder David Darrow and Eldress Ruth Farrington as well as by the Lead Ministry. The Second Bishopric -- Hancock, Tyringham, and Enfield -- was formed in 1790 and headed by Elder Calvin Harlow and Eldress Sarah Harrison. Harvard and Shirley, Massachusetts, comprised the Third Bishopric and was led by Eleazer Rand and Hannah Kendal. Elder Job Bishop and Eldress Hannah Goodrich (a relative of Elizur Goodrich) governed the Fourth Bishopric of Canterbury and Enfield, New Hampshire, formed in 1792. The Shakers formalized the final New England bishopric in 1793 which consisted of Alfred and New Gloucester (later Sabbathday Pond or Lake), Maine. Elder John Barns and Eldress Sarah Kendal directed this gathering.¹⁴⁵ With the appointment of elders and elderesses to govern all the communities, Gospel Order was considered fully established.

Elder James Whittaker had prophesied about the establishment of church order in 1781: "In eleven years the Church will be established in her order." And the prophecy

¹⁴⁴Names of families were again changed in 1814. On November 14 of that year, Calvin Green recorded in his journal that a "change of titles takes place about these days, the order called first family takes the title First order, -- the Second family -- the title Second Order -- the families -- the Title, Second family." *A Journal Begun AD 1811 Kept by Calvin Green Journies [sic] and scenes* (New Lebanon, NY, 1811-1822), WRHS V B 79-81. In 1814 the North House was renamed the North Family. Eventually there were six families at New Lebanon, each with its own covenant: the Church, the Second, South, West, East (or Hill), and the North. Names were based on their location in relation to the central Church Family which was the site of the common meetinghouse. This arrangement of family branches organized around a Church or center family became the structure of all the Shaker communities. Andrews, *Shakers*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁴⁵Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 61.

was fulfilled as spoken; in 1792, the Church was established in order and ready for further progress and growth.¹⁴⁶

Children and Youth: Establishment of the Youth's Order

Between 1787 and 1790, 249 converts, predominantly "nuclear kin groups" or extended families, were admitted to the Church at New Lebanon. Sixty-two of these were children, mostly over the age of seven.¹⁴⁷ The creation of the first separate order for children and youth in 1792 was one result of this tremendous influx of youngsters.

Meacham's beliefs about the sect's responsibility to children was to "take charge of, & bring up children . . . so as to prepare them in future time to be leaders & ministers of the gospel." To accomplish this end, a separate residence for the youth and children was "raised in May 1792, & finished the same year." His goal was to have the building ready for the fifty or so youth and children to "eat breakfast in it Christmas morning."¹⁴⁸

Elder Henry Clough was appointed "lead" or caretaker of the order and "labored" with the older youth "to implant genuine faith and solid principles of the gospel in their souls, so as to prepare them when they came to maturity, to be suitable ages, as burden

¹⁴⁶[Bishop and Wells], Testimony of Amos Rathbun, *Testimonies*, p. 218.

¹⁴⁷Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 23, 213-214. Over 75 percent of the converts joining the New Lebanon Church Family during this period were members of extended families, the most influential being the Goodriches, Darrows, Farringtons, and the Meachams. See also Priscilla J. Brewer, "The Demographic Features of the Shaker Decline, 1787-1900," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 15, 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 31-52.

¹⁴⁸Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VI B 24, pp. 43-46.

bearers in the house of God."¹⁴⁹ But not all the youth succeeded to such a state of maturity, nor did they want to. Calvin Green's biography of Clough indicates that "some among the youth & children would not cleave to the way of God. . . . They would not yield . . . to good order and government." Not only would they not hold to the gospel, they acted in ways abhorrent to the Society: "They grew coarse and vulgar in their conversation & manners, & tried to imitate the world in their appearance & ways, as much as they could."¹⁵⁰

Early in 1795, Shaker accounts chronicle that Meacham foresaw a "great shaking among the young," believing that "hardly two of them would be left together." "Many of them," he wrote, "may depart from the faith, unless the older who are established are able to protect them, until they are either planted or grafted into the present, or succeeding travel of the Church."¹⁵¹ He warned the elders in charge of the youth, solemnly reminding them with "weighty admonitions of their duty." Late in 1795, this "apostate breaking" started and "the unfaithful & unwise conduct of those who had been the two Elders of the young order proved to be one great cause of the apostasy" by "weakening and hurting the faith of those over whom they were placed." This "scattering" continued for about a year, "during which time, a considerable number of the young went from the Church to the world." Eventually, at least twenty boys and young men as well as the

¹⁴⁹Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VI B 24, p. 46.

¹⁵⁰Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VI B 24, pp. 46-47; [Bishop], *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VII B 27, p. 25.

¹⁵¹[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, p. 92.

elders in charge of the youth left the sect.¹⁵² During 1796 alone, the Church Family lost 20 of its 180 members through apostasy. As a result, all the children were transferred to the Church family and the Children's Order was organized.¹⁵³

Humez and Foster, both contemporary historians, suggest that Lucy Wright's leadership contributed to this loss of membership.¹⁵⁴ This incident or series of incidents was partially responsible for the 1795 formal writing of the covenant and the specific requirements for accepting children into the Society. It also contributed to Meacham's failing health.¹⁵⁵

The establishment of this Children's Order in the most devout of Shaker families is suggested to have solidified the belief of negating all relationships, including those between parents and children, even though they were all Believers. Affectional bonds among all family members were now severed; children were physically and emotionally isolated from their parents. Caretakers now took over the physical role of caring for the youth of the Society as the adults pursued their path to perfection.

¹⁵²Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VI B 24, pp. 47-48.

¹⁵³Andrews, *Shakers*, pp. 64, 311; [Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, pp. 91-92. According to Isaac N. Youngs' family record, the twenty apostasies in 1796 were the most recorded during the decade.

¹⁵⁴Humez, "Petticoat Government," p. 6; Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), pp. 37, 271.

¹⁵⁵Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VI B 24, p. 34; [Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, pp. 91-92.

Establishing the Gathering Order

In 1799, the year Lucy Wright reportedly reopened the testimony and set out to capture converts to the sect in the period of the Second Great Awakening, a young Believer's or "gathering order" was instituted "to instruct inquirers and to hear their openings." Ebenezer Cooley, Philip Barlett, Elizabeth Chauncy, and Lydia Mathewson were chosen as elders and eldresses.¹⁵⁶ Jethro Turner recorded this event in his diary for March 7: "this day the Young Brethren and Sisters [were] Put in further Order in their union."¹⁵⁷ Young Believers -- those of any age new to the Society and Shaker beliefs -- were taught the principles of the faith and were counseled in both spiritual and temporal affairs. In the Gathering Order, they were "required to prove their faith by works," generally within a few months to a few years. Shakers believed that the Holy Spirit would either provide "an increase in faith and strength, and spiritual understanding, so as to be prepared for a further privilege," or they would fall short in their spiritual travel and "return again from whence they came." Spiritual "travel" and "privilege" came only after devout consecration of oneself and was evaluated by the elders and eldresses of the ministry.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶"Records Kept by Order of the Church" (New Lebanon, NY, 1780-1855), New York Public Library, 7, p. 16. Quoted in Paterwic, "Individual to Community," p. 22; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, pp. 54, 56-57. Stein describes the Gathering Order as the "Shakers chief agency for the religious nurture of new Believers." The Wells family of Long Island were among the first families to join this new order; 11 of the 14 members of this family were Shakers at their death (p. 454). For a history of the New Lebanon Gathering Order, see Paterwic, "Individual to Community," pp. 18-33.

¹⁵⁷Jethro Turner, *A Memorandum Book Written by Jethro Turner 1789-1800* (New Lebanon, NY, 1798-1800), WRHS V B 75, March 7, 1799.

¹⁵⁸[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, pp. 53-54.

In January of 1800, the old spin shop was refurnished to serve as a dwelling house for these new Shakers; Ebenezer Cooly, John Meacham, Elizabeth Chaucey and Lydia Mathewson were appointed to oversee the Order and moved into the shop "to improve it as a Dwelling house." In March, "Cooly and his Order" relocated to a dwelling north of the meetinghouse and appropriately called the North House.¹⁵⁹

In the Gathering Order, worldly family ties and possession of properties were retained. Children remained with their parents and were not considered part of the Church Family Children's Order. The purpose for creating a specific order for spiritually new Shakers was, perhaps, twofold: one explicit aim was to give individuals and families "first coming out from the world . . . a suitable length of time . . . to confirm their faith by experimental obedience."¹⁶⁰ A second suggested reason is that this arrangement may have worked to limit the interaction between "united" Shakers and those less indoctrinated to the accepted community "order" -- those perhaps more questioning of the doctrines of physical and emotional celibacy.

Those who were faithful and gained a "further privilege" progressed to the next level of commitment and moved to another order where they freely donated their services, and perhaps the use but not ownership of their property and possessions.¹⁶¹ Only material property, not payment for services freely contributed, could be reclaimed if

¹⁵⁹Turner, *Memorandum*, WRHS V B 75, January 22-23, March 8, 1800.

¹⁶⁰[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, pp. 53-54. In 1814 it was renamed the North Family.

¹⁶¹[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, pp. 53-54; Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 69.

they left the family or Society. Wives and husbands now became Shaker sisters and brothers; biological and marital relationships ceased to exist. It is most likely that at this point, children were indentured to the Society.

Covenant Membership

Final commitment to the Shaker Church "was solemnized by signing . . . self and services and all one possessed to the cause"¹⁶² and signified "one Joint Interest and union . . . in Obedience to the order and Government of the Church."¹⁶³ Senior Order or covenant members had to be at least twenty-one years of age and able to commit freely and voluntarily as an expression of their faith and desire. During 1795 and 1796 written covenants were signed in the church or inner families of all the societies for the first time. The original covenant was drafted by Joseph Meacham in 1795 in the New Lebanon Church Family governed by Elder David Darrow and Eldress Ruth Farrington. Everyone accepting full Shaker membership was required to sign this document spelling out the nature of such membership.¹⁶⁴

The covenant further stipulated that a Church member was "never to bring Debt or

¹⁶² Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 69.

¹⁶³ *Covenant of the Church of Christ Relating to the Possession and Use of a Joint Interest* (New Lebanon, NY, 1795), Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, SA 742 (hereafter Andrews Collection).

¹⁶⁴ Andrews, *Shakers* p. 61; Jethro Turner noted in his diary on June 24, 1801, that "the Brothers & Sisters of the first family sine [sic] the Covenant of the Church." As members moved into the First Family, they would periodically have a joint signing of the covenant. *A Memorandum Book of Daily Events* (New York, NY, 1800-1805), WRHS V B 76.

blame against the Church, or each other, for any Interest or Services [bestowed] to the Joint Interest."¹⁶⁵ Members could still withdraw, but they couldn't expect to regain property or possessions, wives or children.

The New Lebanon covenant set forth the basic tenets of the organization of the community: the admittance and reception of new members, including children; the disposition of personal property; the equality of rights for all members; and the need to work together for the common good. This covenant was originally signed by twenty-one Brethren and twenty-two Sisters of the First Family. The signature of Nicholas Lougee is crossed out, suggesting that he left the community sometime after 1795.¹⁶⁶

This 1795 covenant also set down the terms under which children would be accepted into the community:

Youth and Children, being under age, were not to be received as members, or as being under the immediate care and government of the Church, but by the request or free consent of both their parents, if living, except they were left by one of their parents to the care of the other, then by the request or free Consent of that parent, and if the Child have no parents, Then by the request or free Consent of such person, or persons as may have Just and Lawful right, in Care of the Child; Together with the Child's own desire.¹⁶⁷

Children were consecrated to the Society as were all other possessions and property and the same restrictions for their removal applied as it did to all other donated goods.

¹⁶⁵*Covenant*, Andrews Collection, SA 742.

¹⁶⁶*Covenant*, Andrews Collection, SA 742.

¹⁶⁷*Covenant*, Andrews Collection, SA 742.

Conclusion

It is important to recognize that under Father Joseph the organizational structure of the Society was somewhat experimental and evolved in stages.¹⁶⁸ The years from 1787 to 1796 marked the transition from a loosely bound grouping of separate families living on their own lands to a highly structured and regulated communal society. While celibacy was endorsed, we have no way of knowing how rigidly it was enforced in these early years. Nor was there any need in the early years of a separate order for children because so few of the young were under the age of sixteen, the age that marked acceptance as an adult.¹⁶⁹ Early evidence suggests that family affectional bonds between Believers continued even when biological family members lived in separate Shaker families. Even Mother Ann, the Shaker's example for living a sinless life, remained with her husband and cared for him until he chose to leave her. She would, no doubt, also have cared for her children had they lived.

During the spring of 1796, Father Joseph's declining health worsened to the point that he resigned in favor of Mother Lucy, placing the principle duties of leadership on her shoulders.¹⁷⁰ His death in August of the same year created leadership problems for the Central Ministry. Some outspoken male members of the sect challenged Mother Lucy's right and ability to effectively lead the Society. They thought Elder Henry Clough, the

¹⁶⁸Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 25; Pearson and Neal, *Shaker Image*, pp. 29-30; Sprigg and Larson, *Shaker Life*, pp. 22-23, 38-41; Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, pp. 25-27, 40-41.

¹⁶⁹Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VII B 24, p. 44.

¹⁷⁰[Green], *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, p. 25.

junior member of the Lead Ministry, should be elevated to the senior Lead Ministry position held by Meacham.¹⁷¹ When Mother Lucy declined to acquiesce to this request, remaining the sole leader until her own death in 1821, another nineteen left the Church Family.¹⁷²

These high apostasy rates were not to be experienced again until the mid-nineteenth century. Even though Lucy did not elevate Elder Clough to Meacham's position, and thereby did not emulate the order of dual leadership at this highest level, she did retain Clough's strong support and the loyalty of the vast majority of Shakers.

In the decade after Ann's death, the Shaker Society was transformed from a loose association of scattered Believers into a network of highly organized communal families, each self supporting with formal leadership, uniform regulations, and a unified interest. The beliefs of Mother Ann had created a spiritual order dedicated to living a sinless life. Father Joseph ordered these convictions into a pragmatic way of life.

Although Meacham's writings indicate he believed children should be in an order unto themselves, no specific plan for governing the youth was constructed under his ministry. One explanation may be that because traditional or biological family

¹⁷¹Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VII B 24, pp. 49-52.

¹⁷²Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 213-214. All Brewer's statistics quoted in this research are based on two Shaker documents: Isaac Youngs, "Names and Ages of Those Who have been gathered into the Church Since 1787 . . . , some additions by John M. Brown, 1870," Andrews Collection, SA 822; Wallace Cathart's 16,000+ Shaker name file, WRHS XIII 48. During the final decade of the eighteenth century, thirty-nine Believers of the New Lebanon Church Family left the faith. Of these, twenty-five were men, thirteen were women, and one a child. According to Isaac Youngs' family record, twenty of these left in 1796. That only one child left the Society indicates either that the adult apostasies were fairly young and/or unmarried or that married apostates chose to leave with the Shakers any children they may brought into the sect.

relationships were not recognized or valued in the Society by both theology and practice, the Shakers were not prepared to cope with the offspring of these voided relationships either pragmatically or psychologically. Or, perhaps, those drawn to a celibate society were reacting against the almost inevitable role of parent that came with marriage and did, in reality, not want the responsibility or work of raising children or simply did not like children. Outside of separating the children from the adults in order to further the adults' spiritual travel, no early plan seems to have been developed that adequately incorporated the children -- *as children* -- into the spiritual life of the Society, one possible reason for the decline of Shakerism.

The thrust of Mother Lucy's ministry for the quarter century after Meacham would be toward "rapprochement" with the world and the regulation and "consolidation of Shaker doctrine and standards of behavior."¹⁷³ Under Mother Lucy, the Children's Order would also be a target for formalization and regulation; children were not exempt from the controlling efforts to establish stricter order.¹⁷⁴ During this ministration children also took on a new importance because the Shakers recognized their future value as namesakes and their potential economic contribution to the Society. Lucy extended the

¹⁷³Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 37; Sprigg and Larson, *Shaker Life*, pp. 40-45; Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁷⁴Lucy's emphasis on order can be perceived in several ways. First, under her direction the Millennial Laws were collected, codified, and distributed within the Society. She also put great energy into creating publications for the world so they could better understand the Shakers -- "order" and the peacefulness of the "Shaker way" were often used as primary enticements to gain members. See Andrews, *Shakers*, pp. 243-244; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 36; Sprigg and Larson, *Shaker Life*, pp. 40-45; Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, pp. 28, 46-47.

indenture procedure for children and made distinct efforts to gather children into the Shaker fold.

CHAPTER THREE. GATHERING CHILDREN INTO THE SHAKER SOCIETY

Introduction

This chapter proposes that attitudes toward children and the methods of gathering children into the Order varied over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mostly as a result of decreasing conversions of youth at adulthood and internal dissention and discouragement. It is suggested, however, that two primary reasons for accepting children into the Society did not change over time: to carry the Shaker sect into the future, and to augment the Society's labor force. This chapter will delineate the years 1787 - 1900 into five stages of demographic and social history and discuss how children joined the Society in each of these stages.¹

Migration into New York state continued during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, and these Yankee migrants carried the morally intense religion of their forbearers with them. According to Whitney Cross, a "swelling resurgence of evangelistic religion coincided with this period of migration." A concentration of emotional religionists, fired by "waves" of "fervent revivalism," was characteristic of this "burned-over district" from about 1790 to as late as 1845.² The Great Revival of 1799-1800 was responsible for an increasing number of Shaker converts at the century's birth; a

¹Brewer, "Demographic Features."

²Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), pp. 1-4.

second but smaller peak of revivalism occurred in 1807-1808. Excitement slumped during the War of 1812, but afterwards rose to new levels, surpassing all previous experiences and reaching a grand climax between 1825 and 1837, years which coincide with peak membership in the New Lebanon Church Family.³

During the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century, most of the children gathered into order by the Society entered with their parents. As the Society grew during the 1820s and 1830s, however, many more children became Shakers because parents or guardians abandoned their children to the Shakers' care. The reasons for this increase varied, but usually the parents simply gave up their children because the Shakers could give them what they could not: shelter, good food, warm clothing, an education, and training in a trade. By embracing the children who came to the Society during this time, the Shakers fulfilled what they felt to be their Christian obligations of charity, increased their labor force, and helped to ensure their longevity.⁴

Religious revivals throughout New York during the nineteenth century continued to attract the spiritually dissatisfied. One result was the rapid addition of youth to the Society.⁵ Children were admitted into the Children's Order in one of three ways: they accompanied their parent or parents when they joined the Society; they were bound over

³Cross, *Burned-over District*, pp. 10-11.

⁴[Seth Y. Wells], *A plain Statement of custom and manner of receiving, managing, teaching, governing and disciplining children, in the Society of people called Shakers* (New Lebanon, NY, [1815]), WRHS VII B 62, p. 2; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 74, 88-89, 147; Stein, *Shaker Adventure*, p. 88.

⁵Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 30, 39, 93.

or indentured by a parent or guardian who was not a Shaker; or they were "gathered" on journeys, some of which were designed specifically to recruit young, potential Believers.

Gathering Children: 1787-1799

Before Meacham and Wright began to gather the scattered converts into community in 1787, new Believers would return to their farms and families. After confessing their sins and "opening their minds," they pledged to now live as brothers and sisters rather than marital partners. As Believers gradually moved to New Lebanon beginning in September 1787, these families often stayed together but lived separately in their new Shaker family; men and boys lived together but in rooms separate from the women and girls. At this time, families with children lived in the Second Family or lived on one of the outlying farms that would join together in 1791 to become the Order of Families; only unattached adults lived in the inner court or First Family. By 1789 the Church Family, comprised of the First and Second Families, had 233 members.⁶

In 1790, 22 males and 32 females ages seven to sixteen lived in the Second Family in New Lebanon; no children younger than sixteen lived in the First Family.⁷ Many of these children were gathered as whole families joined. From 1787 to 1790, 75 percent of the Church Family's membership were "nuclear kin groups" -- husbands, wives, and their children -- and extended families. Gideon and Mary Turner joined with

⁶Paterwic, "Individual to Community," p. 22.

⁷Brewer, "Demographic Features," p. 36.

their four children in 1787, along with David and Prudence Darrow and their four daughters, and Elizabeth Chauncy and her six children. Illustrative of the importance of extended families and kinship ties are the Farringtons, Meachams, Goodriches, and the Youngs-Wells family. The Goodriches, with "twelve related husbands, wives, and siblings," had the most members in the Church Family. This kin group hailed from Hancock and Pittsfield, Massachusetts.⁸

The Youngs-Wells family network also illustrates these instrumental kin connections. In the fall of 1799, Hudson Academy and Albany public school teacher Seth Youngs Wells, visited his Shaker uncle, Benjamin Youngs, at New Lebanon. Brother Benjamin's life with the Shakers and the underlying theology of the sect apparently made a forceful impression on Wells. He returned to his Long Island home and convinced his nine siblings and his mother of the truth of the Shaker gospel. Seth's brothers and sisters joined the New Lebanon community and his mother eventually entered the Shaker village at Watervliet. In addition, Mrs. Wells assisted in converting ten other relatives to Shakerism.⁹

Prior to 1790, children were not separated from the adults in their family, but

⁸ Brewer, "Demographic Features," pp. 35-36; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 23; Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 95-101. According to Brewer, the Turner and Chauncey children all remained Believers, dying "in the faith." In the Church Family, 45% of the members were from nuclear family groups and 30.1% were from sibling groups, many of whom had parents in other parts of the community.

⁹ White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, p. 111; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 31. These two accounts differ somewhat as to who in the Wells family joined and when. Brewer includes Seth Wells' father as a convert, but White and Taylor cite him as being "bitterly opposed" to the Shakers. Apparently five of the Wells clan later apostatized: one of Wells' siblings and four other relatives.

lived and worked along with the adult members as they performed all the tasks necessary to sustain the communities. In the last decade of the eighteenth century, however, this began to change. In 1790, Meacham took the first steps to form a distinct "youths' order," especially for boys under age 16. These youth were to be housed in one or more of the work shops, living with their caretaker in rooms above the work areas. The separation began by laying the foundation for a "bake shop" and moving the boys into it in October. Whether all of the girls under age sixteen were also put into separate "girls' order" at this time is somewhat unclear, but at least some of the "little girls" moved into rooms at the brick shop the following December.¹⁰ Church records indicate that the younger girls were not fully segregated from the older women of the Society until 1827.¹¹ By 1792, the Youths' Order was a recognized unit in the community.¹²

Partly as a response against Wright's increasing leadership of the Society, some of the boys in the Youths' Order and the elders in charge of their care started a revolt in August 1795, ending in the apostasy of at least twenty male youth and the elders themselves a year later. This "great shaking" led to the transference of supervision of this Order from the Second Family to the First Family; in 1806, the youth were physically

¹⁰*The Domestic Journal of Important Occurrences Kept for the Elder Sisters* (New Lebanon, NY, 1780-1841), WRHS V B 60, December 11, 1790, p. 13; Green, *Henry Clough*., WRHS VII B 24, p. 46.

¹¹ *Journal of Meetings Held in Church Order* (New Lebanon, NY, 1841-1846), WRHS V B 135.

¹²Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VII B 24, p. 36; *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, November 22, 1792 & November 27, 1808, pp. 22, 46.

relocated to the First Family where the more devout adults resided.¹³ At this point, it was apparently renamed the Children's Order.

Brewer tabulates that the first three years after Meacham gathered the Shakers into order (1787-1791), sixty-two children joined the New Lebanon Church Family, the vast majority probably with their parents. Only three more children were added during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Of these sixty-five children, twenty-nine died in the faith as adults, twelve were transferred to other Shaker families or communities, eighteen apostatized, and six were removed by their parents.¹⁴ From this data, one can surmise that approximately forty-five percent of the children gathered into order during the eighteenth century remained with the Shakers.

The Growing Years: 1800 - 1825

After the rash of apostasies in the final decade of the eighteenth century, the Society's numbers stabilized as did the dedication and commitment of the faithful Believers. The reopening of the testimony to the world in 1799 began the years of growth that would bring many new converts, mostly adult with families. According to Brewer, in 1800 no children younger than age sixteen lived in the Church Family. Of the 136 members admitted to the Church Family during 1800-1825, 85 or 62.5 percent were

¹³Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VII B 24, pp. 47-48; *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, November 27, 1806, p. 46.

¹⁴Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 213. The twelve children moved to other families may also have died in the faith, but Brewer's statistics do not indicate what happened to these children after they left the New Lebanon Church Family.

younger than age 16, swelling the depleted ranks of the Children's Order. Of these youth, 50 or 58.8 percent died in the faith. By 1815, seventeen percent of the Family's membership were youth younger than sixteen. In 1820, this percentage dropped to about eleven percent but rose again to almost fifteen percent by the end of this stage.¹⁵

Often even when single individuals joined, other family members soon followed.¹⁶ William Seeley and his family are one example. William first came from New Canaan to visit the Shakers late in 1812. He "staid" three days, returning with his wife and children in May the following year. In July, he "set out on a journey to see his brother" in Mount Pleasant, New Jersey. He and his brother John arrived back in New Lebanon on the last day of September but stayed less than two months before they again traveled to New Jersey. When they returned this time, John obviously had misgivings, as he "went off" the very next day. Polly Seeley, either William's wife or daughter, moved to the Church Family in 1817.¹⁷

¹⁵Brewer, "Demographic Features," pp. 39-43. The apostasy rate rose from a low 2.4% for the years 1787-1790 to 19.9% for 1791-1800.

¹⁶Paterwic, "Individual to Community," p. 26. Paterwic suggests that the majority of this "first generation of young believers . . . eventually left the society, but so many joined that though the percentage who stayed was low, the Shakers grew steadily in numbers."

¹⁷Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, November 23, 1812 - April 22, 1817; *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, July 18 & August 3, 1816, p. 77. Josephus Seeley, son of William and a twenty-year resident of the New Lebanon community, "absconded" with Israel Knight early on the morning of September 23, 1835, "having secretly combined in agreement, and made preparations before hand." In a 1838 testimony, Seeley stated that he left the community and entered into a local business selling herbs, purchased at wholesale prices from Shaker Lewis Wheeler. Wheeler deliberately neglected to inform the community of his activities and made several thousand dollars in sales. At the time of Seeley's testimony, Wheeler was "looking for 'some pretty girl who would like to join hands with a young man like himself.'" *Journal of Daily Occurrences Kept by Elisha D. Blakeman* (New Lebanon, NY, 1834-1840), WRHS V B 131, September 23, 1835; Josephus Seeley, "Testimony Concerning the Illegal Sale of Herbs" (New Lebanon, NY, 1838), Andrews Collection, SA 1012; McKinstry, *Shaker Collection*, p. 289.

Like Elizabeth Chauncey before her, widow Mary Fairbanks and five of her children sought respite with the New Lebanon Shakers in 1812. Her daughter Samantha arrived first, followed a few days later by her mother and siblings. The older children either entered the Children's Order or lived with adults in the Second Family while Mary and the three youngest children went to live at Thomas Tyler's farm.¹⁸ Early in 1817, Hannah Perl, also a widow, came with her small daughter Eleanor, "professedly to join the Society." A week later, Hannah, accompanied as far as Albany by one of the brethren, "took the stage to Argyle to get her other children." She returned two weeks later with another young daughter, Annabelle.¹⁹

Some early converts, like the DeWitts and the Bushnells, were swayed to investigate the Shakers from reading the first Shaker theological publication, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*.²⁰ Mary DeWitt read *Testimony*, became convinced of its truths, and left her home in Lancaster, Ontario, with her husband and eight children to move to the Watervliet community. They arrived there on April 28, 1813. In May, they moved to New Lebanon, "to the place just bought of Patterson" -- one of the Gathering Order houses of New Lebanon community. Slightly less than two years later, John DeWitt left the sect, only to return six months later, begging to be readmitted. His second

¹⁸Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, December 31, 1812; *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, August 22, 1823, p. 99.

¹⁹Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, January 25-February 17, 1817.

²⁰*Journal Kept by Henry DeWitt* (New Lebanon, NY, 1827-1867), WRHS V B 97; *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, April 28, 1813, p. 65. For the history and controversy of this first theological treatise, see Stein, *Shaker Experience*, pp. 69-74.

commitment was more short-lived than the first, and he again went off to the world on September 28, 1816. Shaker Calvin Green thought it "best" he "stay off" this time.²¹

Richard Bushnell, born in Saybrook, Connecticut, in 1791 and working in a New York City comb factory, also read *Testimony* in 1813 and traveled to New Lebanon during July of that year to inquire further. Journal entries during the summer of 1814 indicate that Richard had converted and was living with the Shakers, receiving visits from his father as well as going back to Connecticut to visit family members. In time, four of his sisters and one of his brothers became Shakers. All were unmarried except for his sister Sophia who was married to Gilbert Avery. Sophia and Avery, their two children Eliza and Giles, and Avery's two children from a previous marriage, joined the North Family in November and December of 1819.²² William Taylor's family joined the Shakers in 1820. Their journey from Manchester, England, was reminiscent of the earlier English Shakers. William and his son James arrived in New York on the 6th of January, 1811, followed eleven months later by his wife and five other children -- Betty, David, Fanny, Leah, and Eliza Ann. During the next nine years, the family moved twenty times,

²¹Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, December 31, 1812; May 1, 1813; February 15 & October 25, 1815; September 28, 1816; Green, *Biographic Memoir*, p. 65.

²²Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, July 5, 1813; August 16 & 31, 1814; Paterwic, "Individual to Community," pp. 26-27. Gilbert, Jr. and Julia united with the Shakers at Enfield, Connecticut, at the same time. Ten members of the Bushnell family became Shakers, most of them became well-known within the Society and all of them died Believers. The Bushnell name apparently became so synonymous with Shakerism that impostors would use the name. Thomas Damon recorded in his journal in 1854 that a "Shaker impostor" by the name of Elizabeth Bushnell was "playing her pranky in Baltimore, New York." The impostor's real name was Elizabeth Parker and was once a member of the Tyringham Shaker community. *Memoranda, &c. Mostly of Events and Things which have transpired since the first of Jan. 1846* (Hancock, MA, 1845-1860), Shaker Museum, no. 13,357, August, 11, 1854, p. 149 (hereafter SM).

eventually ending up in Hudson, New York. William and James visited the Shakers for the first time on January 20, 1820. During February and early March, the rest of the family moved to New Lebanon along with their household goods. William and two of the children went to the Second Family while his wife Elizabeth and little William, born after the immigration to America, went to James Farnham's. The rest of the children stayed at the North Family. David, the Taylor's oldest son, had been apprenticed to a weaver in Hudson, but he, too, arrived at New Lebanon on May 12 having "run away from his master." He went to the Second Family to live. William Taylor was 58 years old when he converted, and his wife Elizabeth was 49; the ages of their seven children at the time of their joining ranged from 20 years to 3 years.²³

In *Plain Statement* Wells stated that while the Society gave "preference to children whose parents professed the same faith as us," children of "poor parents" who did not join were also raised and cared for by the Society. According to Wells, these non-believing parents thought "their children will be better taken care of, and more morally brought up among us than any where else."²⁴ Duncan McArthur was one such parent. He

²³ *A Journal kept by Eliza Ann Taylor of The Names and Ages of William Taylor's Family, also where they were born and where they lived in England, And since they came to America, Untill [sic] they came to New Lebanon Which was in the Year of our Lord 1820* (New Lebanon, NY, 1820), WRHS V B 88; *A Journal Begun AD 1811 Kept by Calvin Green Journies [sic] and scenes* (New Lebanon, NY, 1818-1821), WRHS V B 80, January 30-June 13, 1821; *A Journal Begun AD 1811 Kept by Calvin Green Journies [sic] and scenes* (New Lebanon, NY, 1821-1822), WRHS V B 81, May 14, 1821; *Domestic Journal of Important Occurrences Kept by Isaac N. Youngs Beginning January 1856* (New Lebanon, NY, 1856-1865), WRHS V B 71, December 18-21, 1858.

²⁴ Wells, *Plain Statement*, WRHS VII B 62, pp. 2-3.

brought his daughter Amy to the Shakers on March 21, 1814.²⁵ On a summer day in 1815, Bethiah Runnells arrived on the Shaker doorstep with her four children. She left three weeks later, taking her youngest child with her but leaving the other three in the Believers' custody.²⁶

Other parents left their children in the Society after finding the Shaker way not to their liking. Johnathan and Hannah Sellick were one such couple. Richard Bushnell returned from a trip to New York on November 29, 1815, bringing with him the Sellick's two young daughters, Eliza and Emiline, who went into the Children's Order. Hannah arrived shortly thereafter with two more children. Johnathan appeared on December 23rd, but lasted only two months, departing for Troy early in March. In April, he bound two of his daughters to brother Israel Hammon. On May 3rd, Johnathan and Hannah left the Society for good.²⁷

Other children were accepted on a trial basis, presumably to give their parents time to recant their decision and to see if the children "fit" the Shaker mold. Two children came to the sect on this basis in 1821: Samual Stone left his son and daughter "on trial" with the Shakers in June, and another "little girl from Adams" came on the same premise that fall.²⁸

²⁵Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, March 21, 1814.

²⁶Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, June 21-July 17, 1815.

²⁷Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, November 29, 1815-May 3, 1816.

²⁸Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 81, June 4 & October 3, 1821.

Children were "gathered in" by the elders or brethren during various journeys into the world either to conduct business or to specifically to recruit new members. In February of 1822, brethren on separate travels in Massachusetts brought back two unnamed young children.²⁹ Polly Reed was another child who was gathered this way, embracing the Shaker faith at an early age and contributing abundantly to the Society throughout her lifetime. During an 1825 missionary journey to western New York, Polly, not quite eight years old, asked to go home with Elder Calvin Green of the New Lebanon Gathering Order and become a Shaker. Her well-to-do parents consented and Elder Calvin "adopted" the young girl. As an adult, sister Polly taught for many years in the New Lebanon Shaker school and eventually rose to eldress, first in the Senior Order of the North Family and later in the Lead Ministry.³⁰

Revivals in New York state and the surrounding areas contributed children -- with or without their parents -- to the Shaker fold. On occasion, whole communities were gathered such as Savoy and Cheshire, north of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which were ripe for the Shaker message. The "ingathering" of these two communities contributed new members and children to the societies at New Lebanon and Hancock. Following a revival in Cheshire in 1817, the Shakers opened the testimony to a crowd of 400 in January 1818. Frequent visits between Savoy, Cheshire, and New Lebanon during the next three years

²⁹[Wells], *Plain Statement*, WRHS VII B 62, p. 3; Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 81, February 2 & February 5, 1822.

³⁰White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, pp. 156-157.

eventually brought 80 new converts into the Shaker fold.³¹

Two early Savoy converts were Rhoda and Hannah Blake, daughters of Jacob and Olive Blake. When Jacob died in 1817, the two girls went to live with the Shakers. In 1820, Olive transferred guardianship of the girls to the New Lebanon community until each reached the age of twenty-one. Rhoda, eight years old at the time of her father's death, grew up in the Children's Order. In 1833, both Rhoda and Hannah signed over to their mother all the property left to them by their father and joined the Church Family. In 1835, at the age of twenty-six, Rhoda was appointed family deaconess and later held the position of girl's caretaker. In 1861 she was elevated to eldress of the First Family.³²

Sally Lewis from Savoy visited the New Lebanon community with her relation Laura Lewis and two infants early in 1817. During the spring and summer, Sally and her husband Nathaniel sought counsel several times from the New Lebanon elders and eldresses, bringing their children and other relatives with them. Sally, her daughter Sarah Ann, and other extended family members eventually moved to the Second Family.³³

³¹Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, January-December, 1818; Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 80 & WRHS V B 81; Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, p. 65. Savoy became a small branch of the Society but without some of the strictures imposed on the more formal communities. Mother Lucy instructed the Savoy Believers to disband, at least partially because of the difficulty of governing this community. On August 14, 1821, Elders Ebenezer and Peter went to Savoy to "give the Believers there liberty to settle their affairs & gather to New Lebanon, & Watervliet." Two months later on September 17th, Calvin Green returned to Savoy to "make a final dismissal of the Believers from that much tho't dreary place." See also Calvin Green, *Journal of a Trip to Savoy* (New Lebanon, NY, 1821), WRHS V B 90; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 38.

³²Indenture of Rhoda and Hannah Blake (New Lebanon, NY, 1820), Andrews Collection, SA 865; McKinstry, *Shaker Collection*, p. 172; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 46.

³³Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, February 1 & June 28-July 4, 1817; Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 81, September 26, 1821.

Lucy Brown and Amy Bennet of Cheshire are also representative of the converts gained from this gathering. On April 19, 1817, Lucy's father Benjamin brought the two girls to New Lebanon and then left. Two weeks later the girls and several Shaker brethren and sisters returned to Cheshire to visit the girls' parents. During the remaining months of that year, the four adults in the families frequently exchanged visits with the New Lebanon community, apparently trying to decide if they wanted to become Shakers like their two older daughters. Benjamin Brown finally "opened his mind" on the 7th of December, 1817, and joined the sect.³⁴

Amy's parents, Roby and John Bennet, followed a different route. The Bennets had been instrumental in the opening of the gospel in Cheshire, holding a second testimony meeting on January 21, 1818, the night after the meeting to open the gospel. This second meeting was attended by 250 prospective Shakers. Instead of joining the Shakers as his wife apparently wanted, John "ran off and left her." She filed for and received a divorce, joining the Society with her son Ethan in February of 1821. John apparently returned to the area a few months later, still with a dubious commitment to shouldering the "full cross" of Shakerism. Calvin Green recorded in his journal that "John has faith but is bound by the flesh."³⁵

As the problems of governance of Savoy increased and the community drew

³⁴Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, April 19- December 7, 1817.

³⁵Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, January 19-20, 1818; Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 80, February 20 & June 30, 1821.

closer to "dismissal," elders and Church brethren made several trips there on behalf of young children. In August, just prior to the final closing, the brethren brought four children to New Lebanon; one child remained in New Lebanon while the other children went to nearby Shaker communities. Whether Ezekiel Copley joined the Shaker ranks is unknown, but he consecrated two of his children to the Believers. Others came, too: Gathan and Betsy Haskins and their two children, Horace and Oran; Luther Rice, his wife Abigail, and their three children, Sylvester, Louisa, and Mary Ann; and Mercy McClain who went "upon the hill to live."³⁶

Youth under the age of sixteen were formally indentured to the Shakers. These indentures were binding agreements with the deacons or trustees of the Church, girls usually until they were eighteen and boys until they were twenty-one. Age sixteen marked the beginning of adulthood; the young men and women moved in with the adults in the family dwelling house, formal schooling ceased, and they assumed a full work load. Only upon reaching the age of twenty-one, however, could they choose to sign the covenant and become full adult Church members of the Society.³⁷

Indenture agreements served to protect three parties: the child, the parents or

³⁶Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 81, August 16 & 18, September 26, & October 11, 1821; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 38.

³⁷Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VI B 24, p. 44; [Anonymous], "Fifteen Years a Shakeress," *The Galaxy*, XIII (New York, NY, 1872), pp. 194, 199; *Millennial Laws* (1845), WRHS I B 50; Seth Y. Wells, "A Circular Address to the Society at Watervliet Concerning the Education of Children" (Watervliet, NY, 1832), Andrews Collection, SA 951.1; Isaac Newton Youngs, *A Concise View of the Church of God and of Christ on earth: having its foundation in the faith of Christ's first and second appearing* (New Lebanon, NY, 1856), Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 189; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 207; Jane Yolen, *Simple Gifts: The Story of the Shakers* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1976), p. 73.

guardians, and the Shakers. The Shakers promised that the child would be provided the necessities of life -- warm clothing and housing, enough to eat, a basic education and a trade, and the freedom to chose at age twenty-one whether or not to be a Shaker. In return, the parents agreed not to interfere with the child's upbringing or to remove the child from the community. The child's obligation was to behave and accept with grace his or her life with the Shakers, at least until maturity.³⁸

Although the form and wording of indentures differed over time, most contracts after 1809 provided the Shakers with the right to return recalcitrant children to their parents. A child who obstinately refused to conform to Shaker standards and codes of behavior set by the elders or caretakers did not fit the Shaker requirements for order and union. Nor, in return, could the parents charge the Shakers for services the child may have performed, or for not continuing to keep the child during his or her minority.³⁹

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, fifty-five children were gathered into the Children's Order; of these, thirty-five lived out their lives in the New Lebanon Church Family.⁴⁰ Comparing these two decades with the previous two, the successful conversion rate for children increased to about sixty-four percent -- a substantial improvement. Two factors contributing to this increase may have been the stabilization of the Society during Mother Lucy's ministration and her benevolent attitude toward

³⁸ McKinstry, *Shaker Collection*, pp. 177-178.

³⁹ Indenture of Elizabeth Susannah Lamonby (New Lebanon, NY, August 19, 1852), Andrews Collection, SA 879.4.

⁴⁰ Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 213-214.

children.⁴¹ Mother Lucy, like Mother Ann before her, was nurturant and loving toward children and clearly seemed to enjoy their presence. Both women advocated very protective attitudes toward youth, especially those under age ten, and believed in gentle and careful handling that was mindful of their more sensitive natures.⁴²

As the Society grew under Mother Lucy, nearly all of the children brought to the Shakers seem to have been accepted.⁴³ The achievement of more lifetime conversions during Lucy's tenure may, however, reflect more than Lucy's kind attitude toward the children; her staunch belief in the children's importance to the Shaker future and the children's belief in their value to the Society probably contributed to more conversions at adulthood. The relevance of each child's conversion was instilled upon them as the only means of continuation for the celibate Shakers.⁴⁴ Perhaps knowing they played so critical a role in the perpetuation of the Society imparted a deeper sense of responsibility to these children that was absent under later Ministries.

⁴¹Brewer, "Demographic Features," p. 39. In addition to the high numbers of youth who remained Believers for the duration of their lives, other statistics also suggest this stability: the apostasy rate fell to 6.4% for the brethren and 2.6% for the sisters with not one Church Family member leaving between 1800 and 1809; the "average length of stay with the Family for those admitted between 1801 and 1820 reached its highest levels": approximately 25 years for males and 37 years for females.

⁴²[Seth Y. Wells], *Remarks on the necessity of reforming the morals and improving the religious condition of our youth and children: with some propositions for the same* (New Lebanon, NY, 1830), WRHS VII B 66, pp. 8-10.

⁴³Journal entries about refusing children are very rare, especially during this time period. One exception was noted by Green in his 1819 journal: "Alvinry's Mother . . . brought her sister Thankful's (deceased) 3 poor little motherless children to us to take -- but we refused & the next morning they went to Hancock to throw them upon the Town." *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, February 7, 1819.

⁴⁴Green, *Henry Clough*, WRHS VII B 24, pp. 43-44.

After 1820, however, the Lead Ministry seemed to have a more impersonal and distant attitude toward children and may have chosen to admit male children in preference to female. Three reasons for this behavior seem plausible. First, by 1800 the adult male-female ratio already favored females, and the elders did not want to deliberately increase the imbalance; secondly, because labor was essential to the economic prosperity of the sect, male children could make a substantial contribution to this fundamental need for hard, manual labor. And third, twice as many male youth apostatized as females.⁴⁵

Girls indentured to the sect were commonly free to leave when they reached eighteen; males, however, were bound until twenty-one. This difference in ages probably had an economic basis and lends support to the hypothesis of intentional acceptance of more male youth. In 1800, men comprised slightly less than half of the adult population in the New Lebanon community and this proportion continued to decrease with each passing decade.⁴⁶ Shaker economic survival, however, depended on manually intensive agricultural labor and keeping male indentures an extra three years may have helped to meet this constant need for labor.

⁴⁵Brewer's research on the New Lebanon Church Family indicates that "men outnumbered women in the 1780s and early 1790s, and that the male/female ratio in most communities remained remarkably stable through the first half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, more men were admitted to the Society than women. Although most Shaker Families had indeed become predominantly female by the late nineteenth century, this development was due more to external than to internal conditions and should not obscure other important features of the sect's decline." "Demographic Features," p. 33.

⁴⁶Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 210.

The Third Generation of Leaders: 1826 - 1844

After Meacham's death, the more radical or emotional elements of Shaker worship gradually were replaced by "gifts" of a more subdued and formal nature, making it less difficult, perhaps, for those not as committed to Shaker theology to live comfortably in the Society. It is possible that a subtle and somewhat more pragmatic attitude seems to have shifted the balance slightly away from emotionalism and toward additional ritual in the daily worship of God. This is not to say that the emotional component of Shakerism no longer existed, but it was more often tempered and focused into specific ceremonies and became a unified component of worship rather than an individual physical expression of divine influence.

Weakening leadership, rejection of strict adherence to the codes and mores of the 1821 *Milenial Laws* [sic], and shifts in the age distribution of members all contributed to the beginning social decline of the Shakers. Tensions between generations escalated, as did the problems for those "caught in the middle," including most leaders. During this period, 75 percent of new members were children age sixteen and younger, who were primarily unconverted, and who had not entered of their own accord. By 1835, five children younger than age seven and thirty-six youth ages seven to fifteen lived in the

Children's Order.⁴⁷

Brewer's statistics reveal that 32.4 percent of the seventy-one girls brought into the Family between 1821 and 1840 died in the faith. Among the boys, the rate was lower, as only 17.7 percent of the seventy-nine joining in this period remained faithful. Older members were forced to recognize that few children would convert upon reaching adulthood. Indeed, children of both sexes displayed a disproportionate tendency to leave the faith.⁴⁸

Some of those children who left the Society either went to the world when their parents left or were reclaimed by their parents after being bound over. Henry Whitman "turned back" to the world on August 1, 1832, and took his three youngest children with him. Thomas Reed was another father who changed his mind about joining the sect and left with his children in July of the same year. Alfred Thomas, Abby Navarro, Joseph Whiteman, and Oliver Gates were reclaimed by relatives, but in somewhat different ways. Alfred simply returned to New York to live with his mother, Abby was kidnapped by her

⁴⁷Brewer, "Demographic Features," pp. 43-48; Murray, "Membership Levels," p. 37. Murray contends in his research on the characteristics of members that adults "who entered of their own accord . . . were more likely to have been members longer than those who entered as children, whose autonomy in deciding to enter was limited. . . . Shaker communities were embedded in and affected by the greater American economy. When the economy was in a chronic downturn, Church Family populations increase, and the men who entered during these hard times, although not the women, were much less likely to persist as members."

⁴⁸Brewer, "Demographic Features," p. 44. Brewer's note 17 (p. 44) indicates that: "members admitted under the age of sixteen comprised 62.5% of the males and 64.0% of the females." The apostasy rate among males admitted when younger than 16 was 45.5%; among females admitted when younger than 16, the rate was 29.8%. The rates of lifetime commitment represent a significant drop from previous stages: 45% of the children admitted in the gathering stage (1787-1799) and almost 59% of those admitted during the growing years stage (1800-1825) died in the faith.

aunt while she was walking from the Shaker school, Joseph was "taken back" with the means or method unspecified, and little Oliver Gates was, peacefully, "given up to his Father."⁴⁹ Mary Debar bound her young sons William and George to Jonathan Wood in November, 1833, only to reclaim them eight months later.⁵⁰

At other times, scandal forced the removal of young members. In March 1835, Betsey Bates recorded in her journal that "the most disgraceful thing was brought to light that ever was made known in the church" -- Theodore Long and Sally Thomas of the Second Order had conceived a child. Theodore was immediately taken to Hudson by brother Jonathan but the plight of Sally remained unclear. Betsey concluded this lamentable entry with: "Awful Awful Awful. Never did I think this would have been our disgrace. . . Tribulation and trouble."⁵¹

Other losses came from those who had been raised in the Children's Order and seemed, at least for a while, to be content adult Shaker members. Philip Cornwell was one such young man. He, his parents, and his sisters were originally members of the Savoy community. Philip was raised from childhood in the Church at New Lebanon, but

⁴⁹*Journal Kept by Annie Wilson* (New Lebanon, NY, 1832-1855), WRHS V B 127, August 1, 1832; July 18 & October 2, 1833; May 25, 1833; September 1, 1835; January 3, 1836. Six weeks after Abigail's kidnapping, Brother Charles Crosman traveled to Buffalo to attend a hearing on the matter but he found "the prisoner had cleaned the coop & gone!" *Journal of Events Kept by Betsey Bates Beginning April 7, 1833* (New Lebanon, NY, 1833-1835), WRHS V B 128, July 2, 1833.

⁵⁰Bates, *Journal of Events*, WRHS V B 128, November 8, 1833; Blakeman, *Journal*, WRHS V B 131, July 16, 1835.

⁵¹Bates, *Journal of Events*, WRHS V B 128, March 27, 1835.

at the age of twenty-five decided with "his eyes wide open . . . to go to the World."⁵²

Elisha Blakeman was another and a much more difficult and unpredicted loss.

Elisha was sixteen when he and his father joined the Believers in 1834. He went into the First Family, living at the brick shop and working at "joinering," and was later a mentor and caretaker of the boys. His father, a physician, went to the North Family Gathering Order. A brother William did not join the sect but visited on several occasions, especially when he needed the medical services of his father. But in 1872, at the age of 53, Elisha recanted and "made choice of the world."⁵³

The lengths to which parents would go to reclaim their children must have frustrated the Shakers' attempts to increase their numbers as well as tested their beliefs of pacifism. Early in 1846,

three ruffians headed by Robert Jenkins entered the Boys Shop immediately after they came out from supper, and forcibly took Edwin Jenkins and carried him away. Their object was to seize all three of the Jenkins boys, viz. Edwin, Lewis and Theodore, but the darkness and other circumstances prevented their complete success.⁵⁴

One of the more dramatic and lengthy custody conflicts involved the three sons of Ann and William Pillow. When Ann joined the North Family in 1846, the three boys were indentured by William to the Society and went to live in the Children's Order. Like

⁵²Green, *Journal*, WRHS V B 79, June 28, 1817; Steward, *Daily Journal*, WRHS V B 130, May 23, 1835.

⁵³Wilson, *Journal*, WRHS V B 127, October 7, 1834; Blakeman, *Journal*, WRHS V B 131, October 9 1834; March 24 & May 3, 1836; *Vol. 2nd or Small Record Book Kept by Betsey Crosman Beginning November 1848* (New Lebanon, NY, 1848-1872), WRHS V B 143, March 14, 1872.

⁵⁴Damon, *Memoranda*, SM #13,357, January 31, 1846, pp. 7-8.

most indentures, these agreements stipulated that the Shakers would provide a home for the boys and teach them a trade. William, however, did not become a Shaker and bitterly contested the indentures by claiming that they were "invalid" because no specific trade was given. William also charged the Shakers with "inculcating" in his children "civil and religious principles of an immoral and mischievous tendency."⁵⁵

Several times during the next summer, he returned to New Lebanon to reclaim his children; failing the first time, he continued to harass the elders and force Ann and the boys to leave, at one point appearing with a "gang of associates." After putting Ann's bonnet on her head and pulling her by the hand through the hall of the dwelling house, a man and two women

seized each of them one of the boys and were making for the door. Elder Daniel Boler being there stood in the passage and reprimanded them. Some of our sisters were also present, and resisted their hold of the boys who soon escaped. Ann also resisted, and in passing a door near which Samantha Fairbanks stood, seized hold of her and begged assistance. Hannah Ann Treadway being also present, they both held on to Ann, who shortly escaped from William's grasp. William and his company then gave it up, and after much abusive language and shameful conduct they all cleared away.⁵⁶

Charges of assault and battery and the suits challenging the legality of the indentures dragged on for the next four years, causing the elders frequent visits to Hudson to attend court.⁵⁷ Believer Isaac Youngs, the eldest son William's mentor in the tailoring

⁵⁵McKinstry, *Shaker Collection*, pp. 287-288.

⁵⁶*Domestic Journal of Important Occurrences Kept for the Elder Sisters* (New Lebanon, NY, 1842-1860), WRHS V B 61, August 25, 1847.

⁵⁷Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, November, 1848-March, 1851.

shop, was highly distressed to learn of William's impending removal:

On Wednesday night, of the 13th I was woken up about midnight & informed that our case at court had turned unfavorable & that William Pillow, the boy that works with me was in danger of being taken away by his father -- It was concluded best for William to take care of himself the best way he could -- so he took a pack of his things & eloped to some other quarters -- This now heart trying for me -- I set much by William & was greatly in hopes he remain with us & be a very useful & agreeable member -- But as matters are, it is altogether doubtful where we ever see him again.⁵⁸

William Pillow, Sr., however, intercepted the Shakers as they took the boys to the Enfield community for safe keeping. The two youngest sons wanted to go with their father and were peacefully released but William wanted to remain with the Shakers, ensuring continued law suits by his father against the Shakers. During the bitter and protracted legal proceedings his father "was allowed to have things to his own liking" and young William was forced to live away from the Shakers. Brother Thomas Damon recorded his opinion of the court's decision: "Through the bigotry and prejudice of the judge justice was a thing not to be meted out to Believers."⁵⁹ By the time the case was finally resolved in Pillow's favor in 1851, William had lived so long away from his Shaker home that he no longer wished to return.⁶⁰ Seven years later, William and his brother John returned to New Lebanon to visit. Isaac Youngs recorded the bittersweet moment:

⁵⁸*Journal Kept by Isaac N. Youngs September 1839 at New Lebanon* (New Lebanon, NY, 1839-1858), WRHS V B 134, December 1848.

⁵⁹Damon, *Memoranda*, SM #13,357, January 22, 1848-February 20, 1849.

⁶⁰*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 61, September 10, 1847-April 14, 1851.

It was a scene both pleasing and sorrowful -- pleasing, because of the recollection of past days, when he was an innocent & near feeling youth, and one on whom I dared, or relied in hope, that I should in future years enjoy much comfort with and who might be my successor & be a help to me perhaps in my declining years -- and sorrowful, because of the sad change in his conditions, appearance & feeling -- alas how degraded -- how alienated -- how worldly & as distant in spirit as a goat in the wilderness, his face covered with hair & baird [sic] -- & his whole look & motives tainted with a worldly spirit once loved dearly -- now how forbidding! how revolting!⁶¹

Coupled with the high apostasy rates common to this period were the continual conversions of new members and a desire on the part of the elders and eldresses to have "more boys and girls come into the family."⁶² Families, such as the Goodwins, continued to join the sect. While Mrs. Goodwin resided in one of the New Lebanon families, her three children entered the Children's Order. Harriet was "10 years old the 2nd day of last June," her brother James "was 7 the 24th of last February," and Ann Eliza "was 6 the 17th of last Oct." Even though they lived in separate Shaker families, the rules about separation between biological family members was frequently overlooked, especially as more and more youth left the sect; on Christmas day of 1833, Mrs. Goodwin visited her children at the Church.⁶³

Shakers brethren continued to bring children back with them from their travels throughout New England and New York to sell Shaker goods. More often than in earlier periods, these children were orphans or up for adoption. One such child was Julia

⁶¹Youngs, *Journal*, WRHS V B 134, March 4, 1858.

⁶²Bates, *Journal*, WRHS V B 128, October 18, 1833.

⁶³Bates, *Journal of Events*, WRHS V B 128, December 19 & 25, 1833.

Hornbeck, "5 years on the 11th day of last May," who was brought back on just such a trip from Hudson.⁶⁴

More commonly and probably as a response to, and protection against, the increasing removal of young children by their parents, even very young children were indentured. Four year old Helen Stone was indentured in 1841 by her parents Betsey and Henry Stone; her three year old brother Henry was indentured a year later.⁶⁵

Widows and widowers who may have needed help caring for surviving children often joined the sect. Widower Chaucey Sears, who joined the New Lebanon Gathering Order in 1842 along with his five children, was one such person. His four oldest children, ages six to sixteen, were indentured March 28, 1842. The youngest daughter, Elizabeth, was indentured three months later.⁶⁶ Chaucey Sears later rose to some prominence in the Society, becoming an elder in the Canaan, New York, Gathering Order during the 1860s.

Some children, like thirteen-year-old John Augur, were brought to New Lebanon

⁶⁴DeWitt, *Journal*, WRHS V B 97, August 22, 1839.

⁶⁵Indenture of Helen Stone (New Lebanon, NY, 1841), Andrews Collection, SA 878.3; Indenture of Henry Augustus Stone (New Lebanon, NY, January 1, 1842), Andrews Collection, SA 878.4.

⁶⁶Indentures of Adaline Sears, Chaucey Edward Sears, Florinda Sears and Julia Louisa Sears to Jonathan Wood (New Lebanon, NY, March 28, 1842), Andrews Collection, SA 878.5-.8; indenture of Elizabeth Ann Sears to Jonathan Wood (New Lebanon, NY, June 23, 1842), Andrews Collection, SA 878.10. Elizabeth Sears gained notoriety in a somewhat different way than her father. In 1911, she and brother Egbert Gillette were arrested and charged with the chloroform mercy killing of another Shaker sister. The sister was in the final stages of tuberculosis, evidently suffering greatly, and asked to be killed. Sister Elizabeth and brother Egbert were freed but not until after a much publicized trial. This incident led to the closing of Olive Branch, one of the two Florida communities established between 1894 and 1898 for elderly Shaker members in need of a more "salubrious climate." These communities were also a last attempt to gather in new converts to a rapidly declining Society. Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 200.

from other Shaker communities. In 1839, John was moved from Hancock to the New Lebanon Children's Order, perhaps as a way to implement the leaders' wish to increase the number of youth. In the same year, the Ministry returned from a trip to Watervliet with Susan Jane Reynolds, age eleven.⁶⁷

Other communal societies proved fertile ground for gathering children to the Shakers. One community, developed at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, site of Washington's bitter 1777 winter encampment, rendered about fifty converts, many of whom were children. In May of 1827, seven members of this community traveled to New Lebanon seeking the Shaker secret of success for their failing community. The Shakers responded by sending two elders to Philadelphia. One Quaker leader of the Valley Forge group, Abel Knight, journeyed with his family and a dozen or more other inquirers, to New Lebanon and "launched out as Shakers." Abel and two daughters, Sarah and Jane, became steadfast Shakers. Sarah Knight died in her youth, but Jane, "till old age, was a mighty pillar of faith in the Gathering Order." Sixteen year old George Wickersham was another successful Valley Forge convert. White and Taylor described his contribution "to the temporal and spiritual inheritance" of New Lebanon as a "marked ability, faithful labor and [a] pure and noble spirit."⁶⁸

⁶⁷DeWitt, *Journal*, WRHS V B 97, September 1, 1839.

⁶⁸White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, pp. 156-157.

Transition Years: 1845 - 1860

In the years when towns or states had few public orphanages, the Shakers served as a welfare agency for children abandoned because of poverty, illegitimacy, or sickness.⁶⁹ Between 1841 and 1860, 90.2 percent of the 234 new converts were children. By 1855, six children younger than age seven and fifty-six youth ages seven to sixteen lived in the Church. Youth comprised 43.4 % of the Church Family membership.⁷⁰

One such child was Mary Ann Swift, a ward of New York state. In 1848, she was placed by the state under the guardianship of New Lebanon brother Jonathan Wood. Guardianships were treated the same as other indentures, except that the state signed the contract as the releasing "parent."⁷¹ Sarah Jane Mintey came to her Shaker home by a transfer of indenture from David Dakin of Salisbury, Connecticut, to Brother Edward Fowler of New Lebanon. The reason for Sarah's indenture to Dakin was not recorded, but most likely she was an orphan under the Dakin's guardianship.⁷²

Parents also indentured their children over a period of time and as the continuing need arose. On November 16, 1846, Thomas Thompson signed the indentures for two

⁶⁹ Andrews and Andrews, "Children's Order," p. 202; Brewer, "Demographic Features," p. 42.

⁷⁰ Brewer, "Demographic Features," pp. 48-49. At this time, the Church had 143 members older than sixteen.

⁷¹ Letter of Guardianship for Mary Ann Smith to Jonathan Wood, New Lebanon, NY, August 26, 1848, Andrews Collection, SA 878.24.

⁷² Letter of transfer of indenture for Sarah Jane Mintey from David W. Dakin to Edward Fowler (New Lebanon, NY, May 20, 1857), Andrews Collection, SA 879.38.

sons, James and Gabriel, ages nine and eleven.⁷³ A third son, George, age five, joined the Society eight months later.⁷⁴ In a hand-written letter dated May 10, 1848, Thompson placed a fourth son, John, age unknown, with the Shakers.⁷⁵

Children continued to be indentured at very young ages during these mid-century years. Whether James Calver gave up his children or joined the Society himself is unknown, but in August 1850 he placed three sons and three daughters, ages one through thirteen, with the Shakers. All six indentures were hand written by Elder Frederick Evans of New Lebanon and countersigned by two other Shaker witnesses.⁷⁶ William and Amelia Calver both later served as teachers in the New Lebanon school. Mary Martin was also indentured at a very young age --just three years old when she was bound to the Church early in 1851 by her parents, John and Sarah Martin.⁷⁷

These three decades correspond to the ministration of the Lead Ministry installed after Lucy's death. The rising apostasy and removal rate during this period may partially reflect the changing attitude toward children by the leadership, caretakers and teachers, and an increasing dissatisfaction among the youth with Shaker life as compared to living in the world. Throughout these three decades, the body of laws and regulations

⁷³Indentures of James and Gabriel Thompson (New Lebanon, NY, November 16, 1846), Andrews Collection, SA 878.18-19.

⁷⁴Indenture of George Thompson (New Lebanon, NY, July 26, 1847), Andrews Collection, SA 878.22.

⁷⁵Letter from Thomas Thompson to New Lebanon Ministry, May 10, 1848, Andrews Collection, SA 882.3.

⁷⁶Indentures of Ellen Calver, Henry Calver, James Calver, Jane Calver, William Calver and Amelia Calver to Frederick Evans (New Lebanon, NY, August 28, 1850), Andrews Collection, SA 881.1-.5, SA 882.4.

⁷⁷Indenture of Mary Martin (New Lebanon, NY, February 13, 1851), Andrews Collection, SA 879.1.

governing everyday life continually increased. More and more emphasis seemed to be placed on austere order and perfect unity while subordinating the earlier revered concept of an individual and personal relationship to God, especially if a Believer's spiritual travel conflicted with the edicts of the Lead Ministry.

Brewer's statistics support this hypothesis. From 1787 to 1820, sixty-nine females and fifty-one males joined the Children's Order. Of these, seventeen females and twenty-three males left the Order or were reclaimed by parents. During the three decades from 1821 to 1850, twenty-seven more males than females (137 versus 110) were admitted to the Children's Order. Approximately eighty-three percent of these female youth and eighty percent of these male youth did not stay with the Shakers as adults.⁷⁸

The intensification of uncompromising conformity to a 1845 edition of the *Millennial Laws* was partially responsible for the 1846 joint apostasy of four young adults believed to have been faithful Shakers. Brought in as children and reared in the New Lebanon Children's Order, brother John Allen and sister Betsey Ann Bennet quietly left the Church Family for the world and were married on a September day. They took with them brother Derobigne Bennet and sister Mary Wicks, who were also subsequently married, although they painfully regretted their decision shortly thereafter. These two marriages, the first of New Lebanon Church Family members, had apparently been carefully planned during evening "union meetings" approved by the Elders, adding to the

⁷⁸Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 213-214. Thirty-one females apostatized and another sixty-eight were removed by parents. For the male children, sixty-six apostatized and an additional forty-three were reclaimed.

distress of the New Lebanon Ministry. Viewed from the Shaker perspective, these apostasies were much more tragic than any of the previous occurrences of "backsliding" because they represented what seemed to be the way of the future.⁷⁹

These were not, of course, the only youth apostasies, although those later seemed to be reported with less amazement, perhaps even quiet acceptance. In 1854, Elder Thomas Damon routinely related the departure of brother Harvey Lyman on June 8 and Sister Mary Ann White on June 10. The entry that followed on June 22 calmly recorded that they "were tied together with the galling cords of wedlock."⁸⁰

The loss of children continued to escalate during the remainder of the century. Of the 203 children admitted between 1851 and 1870, the most during Shaker history, only seven children signed the covenant and remained faithful Shakers. The rate of lifetime commitment by children raised by the Shakers had fallen to about three percent. Two of those who stayed were Sadie and Emma Neale. Indentured by their foster parents on December 3, 1855, Sadie, age six, and Emma, age eight, both lived lives devoted to the Shakers and died two years apart, as they had been born, at the age of ninety-eight.⁸¹

In August of 1856, Isaac Youngs chronicled his discouragement and the futility he felt concerning the youth of the sect:

⁷⁹Rufus Bishop, *A Daily Journal of Passing Events* (New Lebanon, NY, 1839-1850), 2 vols. Shaker Manuscript Collection, New York Public Library, New York, NY, Sept. 12, 1846. Quoted in Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 140.

⁸⁰Damon, *Memoranda*, SM, #13,357, June 8-June 22, 1854.

⁸¹Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Fruits of the Shaker Tree of Life: Memoirs of Fifty Years of Collecting and Research* (Stockbridge, MA: The Berkshire Traveller Press, 1975), p. 85.

We need not escape to prosper in spiritual things nor raise and keep many of our children & youth . . . we are bound hand & foot -- it seems impossible to get along with our business without hiring. It is truly a serious matter. In addition to its being so hard to save our children & youth, there is the fact that it seem to be a time of universal indifference in the work, no mark of convictions, none sick of sin, few want the gospel -- some drop in occasionally but perhaps soon drop off again. There have been considerable exertion of late for two or three years to go out on a mission to preach, have meetings, & to lecture on our faith & principles. . . . We have gathered in a good many children the year past -- but as before observed, there is no reliance to be placed on them. -- and what are we going to do --. The Lord only knows.⁸²

Unrelenting Decline: 1861 -1900

Youngs' pessimism and discouragement was not misplaced in this final stage as the number of children converting at adulthood continued to plummet. The reality of economic hardship in the world induced many to become Shakers as much for the temporal security as anything else, thus beginning a subtle shift in the balance between spiritual and temporal concerns and the basis of the Society. As membership of the Society continued to rise in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the proportion of Shakers who had known Mother Ann and had partaken in the rigors of establishing the Society began to fall, and with it their singular influence. More people who were spiritually "lukewarm" joined the sect because the Shakers could provide day-to-day food and shelter.⁸³ Of the 110 children brought into the Order between 1871 and 1900, not

⁸²Youngs, *Journal*, WRHS V B 134, August 31, 1856.

⁸³ Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 86-88; Ken Burns and Amy Stechler Burns, *The Shakers: Hands to Work Hearts to God* (New York, NY: Portland House, 1987), p. 103; Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*, pp. 234, 244, 246-247; Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, pp. 49, 63-64, 67; Yolen, *Simple Gifts*, pp. 55-59.

one child among them converted to the Shaker way at adulthood.⁸⁴ By 1875, only one young girl and nineteen youth ages seven through fifteen remained in the Children's Order; by 1885, the numbers were down to one and seventeen. Little Peter Mill and his sister Helen, age eight, were two of the children gathered in during this stage. Sarah Barbour's two daughters, ages four and six, joined Peter and Helen in the Children's Order when Sarah, a twenty-five year old widow from Staten Island, traveled to New Lebanon to leave her children in the Shakers' care.⁸⁵

When only one spouse or parent indentured a child, the Shakers often required verification of spousal death or desertion from a Justice of the Peace. On the back of the 1861 indentures of David and Henry Hamilton, Justice of the Peace Nathaniel Bishop affirmed the testimony of the boys' mother, Jane Hamilton, about her husband's death.⁸⁶ A similar statement by Catherine Cook on the back of the 1863 indenture of her eleven year old daughter, Maria, attested to the desertion of her husband five years earlier.⁸⁷ This practice of verifying sole responsibility for the welfare of a child or children seems to have become more necessary and common after 1840. This was due, in part, to the lessons learned by the Shakers in bitter public conflicts with parents over the custody of

⁸⁴Brewer, "Demographic Features," pp. 49-50; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 213-214.

⁸⁵Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, March 6 & 20, 1866.

⁸⁶Indentures of David and Henry Hamilton to Edward Fowler (New Lebanon, NY, November 13, 1861), Andrews Collection, SA 880.4-.5.

⁸⁷Indenture of Maria Cook to Edward Fowler (New Lebanon, NY, January 9, 1863), Andrews Collection, SA 880.9.

children and the high rate of loss of children by apostasy and removal at mid-century. It seems to have made little difference, however, in spiritually binding youth to the Shakers.

Within the Society, internal instability escalated significantly in the last half of the century partially because of the increased reliance of the Lead Ministry to create union by decree rather than faith. Political struggles between the conservative evangelical Shakers who favored a complex system of rules and the more progressive moderates who believed in fewer controls continued to expand and create dissension among the rank and file members and leaders alike as the century progressed. Fewer and fewer adult converts remained with the Shakers for more than a handful of years, viewing their sojourn among these people as a brief respite from the trials of the world, not as a lasting commitment to a different way of life.⁸⁸ Brewer's statistics reveal that by the 1860s, the average length of stay for males had fallen to 3.9 years and 7.6 years for females. The apostasy rate peaked in the 1870s at 29.7 percent. A decade later, other brethren echoed Youngs' despair and the futility of relying on the youth to perpetuate the sect: "A real money making scheme for Shakers to raise them up give them a good education board and clothe them till they get old enough to be of some benefit and then have them up and kick the bucket."⁸⁹

The ritual of daily life during the first half of the nineteenth century, however, seemed to proceed unchanged for the majority of Shakers, and especially for the children.

⁸⁸ Andrews, *Shakers*, pp. 24-238; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 178, 190; Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*, pp. 227-243, 252-255; Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, pp. 63-64, 67-68, 75-78; Yolen, *Simple Gifts*, pp. 55-62.

⁸⁹ *Farm Journal* (New Lebanon, NY, 1858-1867), Hancock Shaker Village, October 25, 1865 (hereafter HSV). Quoted in Brewer, "Demographic Features," pp. 49-50.

Chores still called for attention regardless of what one believed, and work remained the focus of everyday life. While very little evidence of children's emotional experience as Shakers exists for the nineteenth century, day books and journals kept by Church Family deacons and caretakers document the children's physical life in the Society, which is described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR. THE DAILY LIFE OF SHAKER CHILDREN

Introduction

"Put your hands to work and your hearts to God" -- these words of Mother Ann were the guiding precept for Shaker life, regardless of age.¹ A child's day revolved around making an economic contribution to the Society and preparing himself or herself to assume the full weight and responsibility of Shakerism at adulthood. Daily life in the Children's Order reflected the same balance of work and worship as in the adult order. According to Shaker belief, work and worship were analogous components of every task, no matter how menial or repetitious. Preparing oneself to be an adult Believer and covenant member -- via chores, apprenticeships, and education -- was the everyday work of each Shaker child and the caretakers who were responsible for their welfare and indoctrination into the Society.²

The New Lebanon Children's Order was comprised of the children and youth under the age of sixteen in the First and Second Orders of the Church Family. Joseph Meacham's early writings indicate his desire for separating the "youth" from the adults; at this time, any children in the Society lived in the Second Order. Pursuant to this, a small "brick house" was built south of the dwelling house and the "little girls" moved into it in 1790. In 1792, the "youths house" was constructed and was soon occupied by "the youth

¹Wells and Green, *Testimonies* (1827), Testimony of Lucy Wright, p. 70.

²See pp. 4, 75 for initial discussions of the role of caretakers in the Society.

and children."³ Brewer's data indicate that no children younger than age sixteen were living in the Church in 1800, and Isaac Youngs states in *Concise View* that no children were gathered into the Church from 1792 until about 1806 or 1807.⁴ Mother Lucy informed the elders late in 1806 she thought it best the younger brothers and sisters of the Second Order living in the youths' house "be removed into the first house," presumably meaning the First Order dwelling house where regulations and supervision were stricter. The move occurred in December.⁵ Girls older than seven lived with their caretakers in a portion of the women's side of the dwelling house and the males lived with caretakers or mentors on the men's side. Between 1807 and 1825, eighty-five children joined the Children's Order.⁶

After the late 1820s, children were separated even more from the adults and from each other when the independent girls' and boys' shops were established and the little

³Careful attention must be paid to the definition of "youth." My research suggests that youth, at least in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, meant males ages seven to about sixteen; it did not include females of a similar age. "Children" probably included both males and females younger than age seven. This building was later renamed the "second house" and was used "for the accommodation of the sick and feeble." It was demolished in the early 1850s. *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, August 21 & November 11, 1792, p. 22; Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 475.

⁴Brewer, "Demographic Features," p. 39; Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 366.

⁵*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, November 27 & December 1, 1806; April 21, 1831, pp. 46, 131. Before 1814, the "Church" was the same as the "First Family" and included the First and Second Orders; in 1814, the name of the First Order was changed to First Family, the name of the Second Order was changed to Second Family, and together they were the Church Family. The Order of Families became the new Second Family.

⁶Brewer, "Demographic Features," p. 39.

boys moved to the third loft in the brick shop.⁷ At the age of seven, children became "accountable for sins of commission," and moved into the older girls' or boys' shops. They began to attend school, the boys acquired work "mentors" and the girls worked with Church sisters, both learning the trades and skills necessary to sustain the community. At sixteen, youth "graduated" from the Children's Order and moved into the Church Family dwelling house to live, becoming young Shaker sisters and brothers, and assuming a full work load. Not until age twenty-one, however, were they able to sign the Church covenant.⁸ In *Concise View*, Youngs described the Church "as it is or was" in 1860:

Those under about 15 years do not live in the principal dwelling house, but go there to eat, and live in an order by themselves, under special caretakers, and retire and lodge in some buildings, the most suitable for them. They attend meetings sometimes by themselves, boys and girls apart; and some of the time all meet with the older part.⁹

An increasing demand for space may have precipitated this new arrangement, as the number of children entering the Order rose during the years 1820 to 1860.¹⁰ A second

⁷Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, pp. 368-369; *Domestic Journal*, V B 60, December 13, 1838, p. 200; see also William M. Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups: The Sociology of Unconventional Life-Styles* (New York, NY: St. Martins Press, 1976), p. 176; Sprigg and Larson, *Shaker Life*, p. 45; Yolen, *Simple Gifts*, p. 73.

⁸*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60; *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 61; *Journal of Meetings*, WRHS V B 135; [Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," pp. 35, 37, 194. The young Shaker authoress of this article lived in the Watervliet community. While it does not directly describe the Children's Order at New Lebanon, it is one of the best records available on life as a female Shaker child; the system at Watervliet closely resembled the model set by the New Lebanon community.

⁹Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, pp. 502-503.

¹⁰Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 75, 213-214.

reason for further separating the younger sisters and brothers may have been to further the philosophy of "out of sight, out of mind" for these normally curious adolescents and to stem the rising tide of apostasy, especially among the young adult males. Keeping male and female children apart was perhaps one way to avoid relationships between the sexes and uphold both emotional as well as physical celibacy.

Caretakers

"All [children] under the age of sixteen," declared Hervey Elkins, himself once a member of the New Lebanon Children's Order, "live, eat, work, play, sleep and worship, accompanied only by the caretakers."¹¹ Typically in their twenties, caretakers, like other managerial positions in the sect, were appointed by, and reported to, the Church ministry.

Caretakers also took seriously Mother Ann's counsel about children's idleness: "You must keep them to work; not allow them to be idle; for if you do, they will grow up just like the world's children."¹² Idleness was as sinful and contrary to Shaker principles of union and order as it had been to the early Puritans; all children's time in the Shaker community was carefully scheduled and purposefully used. Time not consumed by school or meetings was spent teaching children practical and functional skills that contributed to the Family's welfare and prepared them for useful adult lives.

¹¹Hervey Elkins, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers: A Narration of Facts Concerning the Singular People* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth Press, 1853), p. 30.

¹²Testimony of Phoebe Spencer, *Testimonies*, p. 277.

Some caretakers enjoyed the constant responsibility of having a dozen or more young charges, but not all Shaker adults relished their stint with the children. Summoned before his Elders on September 2, 1844, Blakeman was informed, and later recorded in his journal,

that it was the gift to have me take some burden and care of the boys!!!!!!--this in many respects loaded down my boat to its last degree of capability of sailing on the ocean of time and unnumbered troubles some visible and invisible. I had but one hours deliberation to reflect upon this new voyage or rout [sic] in which I was about to start upon & not knowing who was to bear me company. I was left in a whirlpool of unsettled thots [sic] on the matter.¹³

The next day, John Allen took "first charge of the boys" with Blakeman assisting him. He moved his clothes from the dwelling house and his "shop accommodations" from the tan to the third floor loft in the brick house, where the youngest boys lived. Three months later John Allen "took the whole burden of the boys," and Blakeman was released from his unpleasant task. He wrote a poem of celebration and commiseration in his journal to commemorate the day:

I'm now released from the boys
 And from a deal of din and noise
 And John is left to rule the roost
 Without a seccond [sic] mate to boost
 My Elders gave me a good name
 So I do leave devoid of shame
 Ha ha ha he how glad I be
 I've no more boys to troble [sic] me.

But John poor John I pity him
 He's got so many sprouts to trim

¹³Elisha Blakeman, *The Boys' Journal of Work* (New Lebanon, NY, 1844-1865), WRHS V B 137, September 2, 1844.

I fear his soul will be out tir'd
 In doing that he ne'r desired.
 O may he have a real gift
 The good from evil all to sift
 And may I no more mid the boys
 Be troubled with their chattering noise.

May heaven bless dear Br. John
 In all that he sets out upon
 May he find comfort with the boys
 And feast upon their constant noise
 While I take comfort in the house
 As still as any little mouse
 And feast upon the precious gift
 Which from the boys gave me a lift.¹⁴

Although Blakeman did not relish his stint as caretaker with the younger boys, in March the following year, he was acting as a work mentor for the older boys, apparently finding more satisfaction with these older youth than with the little boys.¹⁵ This, too, was apparently short-lived, as John Allen "absconded" and Blakeman returned to being a caretaker.¹⁶

Not all caretakers seemed to be temperamentally suited to the stresses of caring for young children. While few incidents of abusive behavior toward children are documented, it did occasionally occur. A young Watervliet Shakeress recalled that her "frail" and "delicate" caretaker once took her hand, "declaring it to be a little plump cushion, and taking a pair of scissors that hung at her side she said she would see what it

¹⁴Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, Nov. 20, 1844.

¹⁵Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, March 19, 1845.

¹⁶Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, September 12, 1845.

contained." The caretaker pressed the "cold steel blades" of the scissors against the soft flesh of the child's palm, causing blood to spurt out.¹⁷

Others found their assignment to the Children's Order to be more frustrating than relevant and one for which they found themselves unprepared. William Calver recorded his disappointed feelings when he opened the boys' school in November 1858:

Very much contrary to my expectations I was called upon a few days sine [sic] & requested to take upon me the burden of teaching school. I was surprised because I had supposed the idea of my becoming a teacher had been entirely abandoned. It is true I attended the school last Winter for a few days as an assistant of Br. Calvin but having the principle burden of the seed business and not having a superabundance of help my stay was necessarily short. Considering these things & knowing at the same time Br. Calvin's predilection for School Teaching (which is of course acquired) I supposed I should not be called upon to shoulder the unenviable burden.¹⁸

While not all adults in any culture or in any time period have the aptitude or desire to work with or care for children, conceivably the negative sentiments or behaviors exhibited to the Shaker children by Blakeman, Calver, and the anonymous girls' caretaker influenced their relationships with these adults, and therefore influenced the children's relationship to the Society. In addition, Shaker journals and diaries rarely suggest how the adults in the sect felt about children or felt about the children in the Society. The primary exception to this paucity of information are the feelings of frustration and disappointment recorded by the leaders about how many children and youth left or were

¹⁷[Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," p. 35.

¹⁸William Calver et al., *School Journal* (New Lebanon, NY, 1852-1887), HSV, November, 8, 1858. This journal was kept by many different teachers: William Calver, Henry Hollister, Calvin Reed, James Calver, Peter Greaves, and Emma J. Neale. Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 76, 246.

removed. How personal perspectives such as these contributed to youth leaving the Society is difficult to determine, but that they had some unfavorable impact is possible.

In spite of all the prohibitions against personal relationships, sisters and brethren occasionally did form a close friendship with a youngster, with the older Shaker acting as a surrogate parent to the younger. These friendships, although stringently discouraged in the *Millennial Laws* and hindered in daily practice,¹⁹ also served as one means of transmitting spiritual and Societal values and were usually a vivid example of how to live a productive and happy Shaker life. Teenager Elisha Blakeman's fond attachment and respect of Luther Copley, who taught him woodworking, was revealed in poem Blakeman wrote on Copley's death in 1851:

He was indeed a lovely child,
Of God & Wisdom meek and mild
Of Mother's spirit he partook,
And all he did was like a book
Wherein his character may be
Most clearly read of Luther C.
A holy, honest, upright man,
A child of God and Mother Ann.²⁰

Since Blakeman remained a faithful Shaker for another twenty-one years, one could infer that his relationship to Copley was a positive influence.²¹ Perhaps if such relationships had occurred more often than the primary data suggest, more children would

¹⁹*Millennial Laws* (1845). The *Millennial Laws* of 1845 state that "children should never be made equals or playmates of, by those who are older. All should be sociable with children, but not familiar."

²⁰Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, April, 1851.

²¹Blakeman apostatized in March 1872 at the age of 53, "making his choice of the world." Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, March 14, 1872.

have converted to the Shaker way at adulthood.

Child-rearing Philosophy

Nineteenth century evangelical attitudes toward rearing children are often characterized by the concept of "breaking their will."²² This viewpoint was tempered by Mother Ann's more nurturing and less punitive ideas about guiding children. After all, she proclaimed "little children are nearer the kingdom of heaven than those who have grown to riper age."²³ One account of her advice was recorded in *Testimonies*:

It needs great wisdom to bring up children; and if they are rightly taught, they may grow up in the way of God. You ought not to cross your children unnecessarily: for it makes them illnatured; and little children do not know how to govern their natures. You ought not to blame them for every little fault or childish notion; but when they are disobedient, then let them feel your severity, and let your word be a law to them. But you ought never to speak to your children in a passion; for if you do, you will put devils into them.²⁴

But discipline was never lacking in the Society. If any child "broke union," he or she was called to confess the transgression to the appropriate caretaker and make atonement. Shaker religious law, explained Hervey Elkins, strictly forbid the use of physical punishment "except the use of small twigs applied to extremely contumacious children under a dozen years of age."²⁵ Any child requiring "extreme severity of

²²Philip Greven, *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1992), pp. 60-72.

²³[Green and Wells], Testimony of Jemima Blanchard, *Testimonies*, p. 216.

²⁴[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 37.

²⁵Elkins, *Fifteen Years*, p. 30.

coercion" was not wanted by the Shakers and was returned to the parents or guardians.

"Inclining the mind" and "bending the will" by "prayer, supplication, persuasion and keen admonition" were the methods used by caretakers and teachers to bring children into Shaker order and develop personal discipline.²⁶ Seth Youngs Wells, developer of the Shaker educational system, reminded children in 1833 of "the importance of strict obedience and true submission to their Elders and caretakers, as the only means to enable them to be useful to themselves and others, and of securing to them their everlasting happiness."²⁷

Such moral force brought to bear on youthful minds, however, could be severe. The Lead Ministry, in addition to the caretakers and teachers, continually stressed the benefits of Shakerism to the youngsters -- its comforts, security and rewards -- in an attempt to dissuade them from returning to the world. But occasionally more forceful messages were delivered to a child, such as this fearful one in 1840: "If you ever get tired of being reproved by and instructed by your Elders, and turn to the world for rest, you will have to go to hell, never to be redeemed." Fear of what would happen if they did venture into the world may well have been an important force binding children to the Society.²⁸

²⁶Elkins, *Fifteen Years*, p. 30.

²⁷Letter of Ministry Canterbury to Ministry New Lebanon, February 16, 1833, WRHS IV A 12.

²⁸Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 192.

Daily Life

All Shakers, young and old alike, woke with the tolling of the rising bell, rung at 4:30 a.m. in the summer and 5:30 a.m. in the winter.²⁹ Quickly out of bed and onto their knees, children spent a few minutes in morning prayers and silent meditation, then dressed and began their morning work. Like other children of the day, Shaker children had regular chores. Children's morning chores were much like the adults -- airing and sweeping the retiring rooms, milking cows, filling woodboxes, and feeding livestock. These were completed before breakfast, leaving the rest of the day to pursue other work or school.

Indenture agreements stipulated that children would be taught a trade such as "the art and mystery of farming or such other occupation."³⁰ For boys, this meant apprenticeship to an experienced Shaker skilled in a particular skill. Besides farming, trades listed for the male minors included shoemaking, "tayloring," carpentry, agriculture, and gardener-seedsman. Housekeeping, dressmaking, tailoring, spinning, and dye-making were the common occupations specified for female progeny.³¹ Girls attended school for four months in the summer and boys for a similar period during the winter. This plan kept the sexes separate and enabled the boys to work on the farms during the important summer and fall harvest months.

²⁹*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, April 1831, p. 131.

³⁰Indenture of David Hamilton (New Lebanon, NY, November 13, 1861), Andrews Collection, SA 880.4.

³¹Collection of Apprenticeships (New Lebanon, NY, 1809-1895), Andrews Collection, SA 876-883.

Dress

Cleanliness also extended to children's personal appearance. *The Gospel Monitor* advised caretakers to keep a close eye on their children, and "see that they are punctual to dress themselves neatly and tidily; and above all, to wash clean their faces and hands, and they never ought to pass over a week, except in the coldest weather, without washing their bodies more or less, or having it done for them."³² In an 1858 essay, Elder Frederick Evans advocated that children bathe regularly in water warm enough "to cause a warm, glowing reaction" and "dispense with underclothes" for better health.³³

In the early years of the Society, uniformity of dress was strictly enforced, even with the children. Children were dressed -- and treated -- as little adults. Girls wore long butternut colored gowns during the winter with blue and white checked aprons, shoulder handkerchiefs or capes of white cotton, and white linen caps with their hair neatly concealed beneath. Summer gowns were lighter only in color and weight. Boys wore the same style clothing as the adult males: drab cotton trousers and blue or gray jackets. Hats were of a regulation height and width, fur in the winter and straw in the summer.³⁴ Boys' hair was cut the same as their adult counterparts, straight across the forehead and in line with the bottom

³²*The Gospel Monitor: A Little Book of Mother Ann's Word to Those Who Are Placed As Instructors and Care-takers of Children* (Canterbury, NH, 1843), p. 23.

³³Frederick W. Evans, "Shaker Travail" (February, 27, 1858), in *Essays* (New Lebanon, NY, 1891).

³⁴[Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," p. 31; Andrews, *Shakers*, pp. 149-151.

of the ear.³⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century, children's clothing styles, especially little girls, had changed significantly and were more fashionable and less restrictive. Late century photographs taken of New Lebanon children and their caretakers presented the youngest girls in flowered and ruffled short dresses, hair curled and adorned with large Victorian style bows.³⁶ Older girls still wore the more conservative fashion of the adult women with their shoulder capes and longer skirts and aprons, but caps were saved for the Sabbath, and fabrics were brightly colored plaids or stripes. During the warmer summer days, boys discarded their jackets and shoes, pursuing their daily activities in cotton shirts and pants and big straw hats to protect them from the sun.

Eating Arrangements

Mealtimes were punctual (breakfast at 6 or 6:30 a.m., dinner at noon and supper at 6 p.m.) and were preceded by a fifteen minute period of quiet mediation. Before 1837, children imitated adult procedure, following the two segregated columns led by the Family elders and eldresses silently into the dining hall. Here they stood, hushed and still, behind their chairs until the Lead's signal to kneel and bow their heads in prayer.

³⁵"Laws in relation to cutting the Hair and trimming the Beard." Quoted in David Lamson, *Two Years' Experience among the Shakers: Being a Description of the Manners and Customs of That People; the Nature and Policy of Their Government; Their Marvellous [sic] Intercourse with the Spiritual World; the Object and Uses of Confession, Their Inquisition; in Short, a Condensed View of Shakerism As It Is* (West Boylston, MA, 1848), p. 38.

³⁶Pearson and Neal, *Shaker Image*, pp. 75-90. Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*, p. 130.

Children were seated apart from the adults, the sexes at separate tables, in the typical four-square Shaker fashion.

When the little girls moved to the "east house" in 1837, all the children -- meaning both the younger boys and girls -- began also to eat their meals in this shop, the boys "at the first sitting" and the girls "at the second."³⁷ This was again changed in 1845 when the cooking was "removed" to the kitchen in the "west house" and was all done at one kitchen.³⁸

Adults and children ate their meals in silence, mindful to eat all they wanted but to also "Shaker their plates."³⁹ Ever economical and thrifty, the Shaker handbook on rearing children, *The Gospel Monitor*, advised children's Caretakers to "not stuff them with victuals. They had much better leave the table hungry, than to eat one mouthful more than needful."⁴⁰

A set of mealtime instructions or table monitor written specifically for children also emphasized economy as well as acceptable table manners. In rhyme, the monitor first advised children how to select and cut their meat, eat their vegetables, portion their bread and butter and quietly sip their drink. Children were told to "sit straight and trim," neither to "laugh nor frown," and to observe silence at all times. Admonishments on

³⁷*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, August 21, 1792 & April 26, 1837, December 8, 1840, pp. 22, 197, 212.

³⁸*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 61, December 29, 1845.

³⁹A modern idiom for the Shaker rule that members had to eat everything they put on their plates.

⁴⁰*Gospel Monitor*, p. 25.

physical behavior while at the table then followed:

Don't pick your teeth, or ears, or nose,
 Nor scratch your ear, nor tonk your toes;
 Nor belch nor sniff, nor jest nor pun,
 Nor have the least of play or fun.
 If you're oblig'd to cough or sneeze,
 Your handkerchief you'll quickly seize,
 And timely shun the foul disgrace
 Of splattering either food or face.⁴¹

When considered within the Shaker context of order, these expectations sounded neither exceptional nor unusual, but did, perhaps, require some adjustment for children fresh from the world.

Children generally ate a simpler version of adult meals -- lavish as they were -- and had less variety in the choice of foods.⁴² They were equally affected by the dietary disputes that plagued the Society during the 1830s and 1840s as were the adults. The temperance movement was sweeping the nation as a whole, but the dietary reforms of Sylvester Graham especially appealed to some Shakers. Grahamism was part of the larger interest in vegetarianism among the Shakers. On a sabbath day in 1835, "liberty was given for all who chose it, to adopt the more healthy mode of diet, recommended by Sylvester Greyham [sic]."⁴³ Graham's diet abolished the use of stimulants, such as coffee, tea, and chocolate, and emphasized the use of coarsely ground and unbolted grains in baking. Graham also claimed that his meatless diet, along with other dietary

⁴¹"Advice to children on behavior at table" [s.l.: s.n., 18--], Andrews Collection, SA 1298.2.

⁴²Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 503.

⁴³*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, September 6, 1835, p. 185.

modifications, would control or at least diminish the sexual impulses in young men.⁴⁴ All who adopted his program, he claimed, could "so subdue their sexual propensity, as to be able to abstain from connubial commence, and preserve entire chastity of body, for several months in succession, without the least inconvenience." Seth Wells even recommended that young boys be required to read Graham's "Lecture to Young Men."⁴⁵

Graham's recommendations met with mixed success in the various communities. Elder Frederic Evans of the Gathering Order of New Lebanon was an avid proponent of the diet, but others believed that "setting an abundance of food before both old and young" was the more healthful route. Thankfully for the younger children, most of their caretakers seemed to take the latter stance.⁴⁶ However, any method of decreasing normal adolescent sexual tensions gained Shaker attention as more male youth and young Brethren chose to leave the Society just as they entered their most valuable and productive years of labor.

⁴⁴ Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 106; see also Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*, pp. 152-153.

⁴⁵Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men, On Chastity, intended also for the serious consideration of parents and guardians* (Providence, RI, 1834), pp. 79-81. Quoted by Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 32; Seth Wells, "Remarks on Learning and the Use of Books," (New Lebanon, NY, March 10, 1836), Andrews Collection, SA 770; Freegift Wells, *A Series of Remarks Showing the power of the Adversary in leading honest Souls astray through the influence of Inspired Messages. Or a Lamentation because the beauty of Zion hath faded, and Her Light become dim* (New Lebanon, NY, 1850), WRHS VII B 266.

⁴⁶[Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," pp. 193-194. In *Notebooks #5 and #6*, Freegift Wells writes extensively about the difficulty the vegetarian movement encountered in the Society (Watervliet, NY, 1855-1856, WRHS VII B 270a).

Meetings

After supper and evening chores, children attended evening meetings and worship services, usually apart from the adults, but occasionally "meeting with the older part."⁴⁷ One hour "union meetings" were held for the youth on Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday evenings. These meetings were designed for conversation, to learn new songs, or to hear the poetry or writings by other Shakers. Children sat in the same manner as the adults with rows carefully spaced and facing each other. Evening services were held on Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday evenings. The children's meetings were shorter than the adults' and did not emphasize quiet meditation and prayer to the same degree. Bedtime followed at 9 p.m. in the winter and 10 p.m. in the summer, preceded, of course, by a few minutes of bedside prayers.⁴⁸

On Sundays, the youth attended only one of the worship services, usually in the morning. These services, open to the public, exhibited another dimension of worship. All work and worship was for the glorification of God, but these carefully planned and orchestrated morning Sabbath services were both an act of personal devotion and a means of bringing the world to the Shaker door. Shakers were famous for their intricate dance formations and interpretive movements. Children were an integral component of these dances as much from the aspect of worship as from their appealing presence.

⁴⁷Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 503.

⁴⁸[Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," p. 34; Elkins, *Fifteen Years*, p. 30.

Dwelling Rooms

Children's retiring or sleeping rooms looked like all the other retiring rooms: plain, simple, sparsely furnished, and immaculate. Floors were plainly oiled and dotted with simple, woven cotton rugs or runners; windows were large and uncurtained to let in fresh air and light; walls were plainly white-washed with one or two rows of peg-board strips. A simple stove stood in the middle of the room, with a neatly stacked box of wood nearby. The ever-present broom and dustpan stood close to encourage the quick removal of any intruding dust or dirt. Narrow low beds with thick corn husk mattresses were covered by cotton spreads woven by the Shaker Sisters. A candlestand, beautifully and simply crafted by the Brethren, held a single wooden or tin candleholder and candle. A Shaker chair or two hung from the wall pegs or stood against a wall. One small mirror, conforming to the dimensions prescribed by the *Millennial Laws*, was the only wall ornament. Children's rooms differed only in scale from the adult retiring rooms -- beds, chairs and pegboards made to meet the smaller size or lower reach of the room's occupants.⁴⁹

Life in the Boys' Order

Younger male children lived with their caretaker and the older brothers in first order dwelling house, or after the late 1820s, in the third floor loft of the brick house. Male youth old enough to learn a trade lived with their mentors in the various work

⁴⁹*Millennial Laws* (1845), WRHS I B 50.

shops. While several journals do record fairly frequent changes in the caretakers for the little boys, the mentor system employed with the males provided for more work and relationship continuity. Youth would often live with an older brother work mentor for several years, learning a trade and sharing lodgings.⁵⁰

The brethren employed a seasonal work rotation based on the primary occupation of farming. The boys' caretaker and his youth worked in a group at the same jobs as the adults but in separate areas. During haying season, for example, the boys worked in one field raking or gathering the hay after it had been cut, while the adult brothers worked in another field cutting the hay.⁵¹

Henry DeWitt's journal gives a picture of the life of a boy in the New Lebanon Children's Order in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Henry was seven years old when his parents joined the Watervliet society and then shortly thereafter moved to the New Lebanon community. He and his parents first lived in the Gathering Order at the Patterson house; just two weeks short of his eighth birthday in December of 1814, he moved to the Children's Order in the Church. His first occupation was "heading nails, cutting & c. 'till I was about 14 years." He then "went on the farm to work 2 or 3 years" and then went back to "nailing" until 1823; by then he was of the age to move out of the Children's Order and into the dwelling house with his Shaker brothers.⁵²

⁵⁰Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137.

⁵¹Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, July 1846.

⁵²DeWitt, *Journal*, WRHS V B 97.

The record left by Benjamin Gates illustrates the diversity of his life in the boys' order a decade after Henry DeWitt. Begun in 1827 when he was eleven years old, this "day book" records the daily life of the young boy until he reached adulthood.⁵³ Benjamin was apprenticed to a tailor when he was not in school during the four month winter term. In his day book for 1827, he recorded the pursuit of many activities besides tailoring, depicting both the continual need for labor within the Society and the degree to which children contributed to the common welfare. Haying, berrying, gathering herbs, and washing sheep were common summer jobs. In August of 1829, Benjamin helped Isaac Youngs repair the roof of the Meeting house porch. The same month a year later, he worked at haying, gathered lobelia and bugle, and went to Whitens Pond to catch "fun trouts."⁵⁴ In the fall, Benjamin helped with the harvest chores of slaughtering hogs, picking apples and making cider, digging potatoes, and gathering herbs.

The entries in his journal for September 1830 indicate that he gathered "herb roots," "maiden hair" fern, and "colts foot" for preserving. In the following month of October, he dug "evens root" in the swamp and again went after bugle. All these chores were, of course, in addition to his tailoring work, such as the jackets he made for Horace Haskins, Peter Long, Calvin Reed, and Jones Allen. October was a very busy month for Benjamin, as he also did "various chours [sic] about the buttons," went "chesnutting"

⁵³Benjamin Gates, *A Day Book or Journal of Work and Various Things* (New Lebanon, NY, 1827-1838), Andrews Collection, SA 1030. A day book is an accounting book in which details of transactions of the day are recorded chronologically in diary form.

⁵⁴Gates, *Day Book*, Andrews Collection, SA 1030, August 1829, August 1830.

[sic], dug potatoes, cut carpet rugs, and picked winter apples. November found him "stringing buttons" and making several more jackets, trousers, and pairs of "drawers."⁵⁵ When not in school during the winter, he often worked binding books and chopping and hauling wood and ice. Spring found him preparing for a new planting season by trimming trees and working in the gardens.⁵⁶

During the winter school term, the boys continued learning trades other than farming. When school was dismissed in March 1845, Blakeman recorded the sum of their out-of-school activities:

The boys have been engaged the winter past outside of going to school and getting in work & various chores as follows -- Joshua & Chauncey in the shoe shop (Joshua has staid [sic] home several weeks & worked pretty steady in the shop not going to school.) Charles S. & John B. in the taylor shop. The rest of the boys sorted a great deal of broom corn for working into brooms & brushes, gone to milking sabbath days & stormy weather, Got in the wood at the Office, East House, Wash House for the menders Ironers & c. Great House kitchen & first hall above second house, Nurses Shop, East & West spinning shops, Brick shop throout [sic], coopers, & Joiners shop, Hatters shop 7 their portion at the school house, May & Edward have cut several lbs of Koon & Muskrat [sic] for hatting, The boys have performed a great variety of other chores not mentioned to numerous to name & have braided hats . . .⁵⁷

Shakers firmly believed that each person would be given as many "gifts" as he or she could use and encouraged their members to be well trained in many facets of Shaker life. Teaching the boys to knit to help keep them busy during cold spring and winter days, however, may have carried usefulness doctrine one step farther than the boys

⁵⁵Gates, *Day Book*, Andrews Collection, SA 1030, September - November, 1830.

⁵⁶Gates, *Day Book*, Andrews Collection, SA 1030.

⁵⁷Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, March 19, 1845.

liked.⁵⁸

Life as a Shaker boy was not all work, however. Several times a year, boys were taken on excursions called "ride outs" by their caretakers. Boy's mentor Elisha Blakeman recorded one occasion in July 1845:

Took all the boys and gave them a ride out. Go thro' Pittsfield & so on to Louisburgh Pond, where we stoped [sic] -- hired 2 boats (one a sail boat the other a row boat) sailed & cruised about to our pleasures & had much recreation [sic]. Bathing also formed a beautiful & pleasant portion in our amusement. Eat our dinner drank soda. . .⁵⁹

On two consecutive September days in 1847, Blakeman recorded other excursions with some of the boys in his care:

Ride out to Steventown with 3 boys . . . got 32 quarts blackberries, sold 1/2 bushel of tomatoes and a bushel of apples. Bought 1 lb. of candy for 20 cents. . . . Took myself and 11 Boys -- a ride out to Lenox and from there to Pittsfield & home by the Pool Hill. I spent \$2 for the Boys out of the money we received for a lot of apples we sold. Bought 2 lbs. & 3/4 of candy, peanuts 2 quarts -- raisins 1 lb. -- figs 7 lbs. or nearly 1 keg.⁶⁰

Fishing was also a favorite recreation, as seen from Blakeman's August, 1851, note: "J. D. took P. S. & oldest boys to Whiting pond fishing and for pleasure."⁶¹

⁵⁸Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, March 12, April 17, & December, 1850. At this time, knitting was clearly considered "women's work" by men in the larger society; while the Shakers did not ascribe to many worldly ideas, domestic tasks within the Society were very clearly assigned to women. See also Beverly Gordon, *Shaker Textile Arts* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1980), pp. 27, 81, 84; June Sprigg, *Shaker Design* (New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), p. 174.

⁵⁹Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, July 12, 1845.

⁶⁰Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, September 2 & 3, 1847.

⁶¹Blakeman, *Boys' Journal*, WRHS V B 137, August 8, 1851.

Life in the Girls' Order

Two girls' orders existed in the Church family, one in each of the First and Second Orders, at least until 1846. Church records indicate that in the Second Order "previous to the year 1827, there was no established order for the girls; they were placed promiscuously under the charge of different persons and resided in the dwelling house." The sisters who acted as caretakers are noted as too "numerous to make a delineation." In 1827, however, the girls in this order were "established" in the "West Spinshop" occupying the "upper loft."⁶²

This same situation did not exist in the First Order. Girls older than age seven moved from the dwelling house to the youths' house in 1806. In 1831, when all those living in the great dwelling house took up residence elsewhere in the community to allow for the expansion of the dwelling house, these girls then "moved to the school house chamber where they work and lodge."⁶³ In February of 1832, the school house or "old North Shop" was "evacuated" by caretaker Sally Dean and her girls and they moved into the "west spinshop."⁶⁴ The little girls continued to live in the youths' or second house until 1837 when these younger girls moved to the "east house" or old "east spinshop." The older girls joined them in the east house early in 1841, with the little girls living in

⁶²*Journal of Meetings*, WRHS V B 135, 1827.

⁶³*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, April 21, 1831, p. 131. The old north shop was "fitted up" in 1817 to be the first school house.

⁶⁴*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, February 1, 1932, p. 141.

the "second loft" and Amy Reed and Harriet Goodwin appointed as caretakers.⁶⁵

Caretakers of the girls were appointed by the deaconesses of each order. Records for the Second Order suggest that once a caretaking system was established in 1827, there were usually two women assigned to this task, one acting as assistant. For 1827 and 1828, Rachael Vining and Polly Thomas were named. For the next four years, no caretakers names were recorded, suggesting either that Rachel and Polly continued as caretakers during those years or that no girls were living in the Second Order, thus negating the need for caretakers. The records resume in 1833, with Rachael still in charge and Hannah Blake now appointed as her assistant. In 1834 Hannah assumed sole responsibility (and presumably acted alone for four years) but was joined by Hannah Ann Agnew in August of 1839. In November of 1839, Abigail Crosman was appointed first caretaker, continuing to be assisted by Hannah Ann until March of 1841, when Leah Taylor took her place. Leah served alone from April to November of 1842. At that time, Rhoda Blake and Teresa Lannicur took over caring for the girls for about ten months, when Rhoda was replaced by Joanna Vining. Joanna was still caring for the girls at the close of 1845 when the records end, but Augusta Lannicur had taken Teresa's place.⁶⁶

The records are not as complete for the First Order. From various journals, however, a piecemeal record can be assembled. One of the first clear entries about girls' caretakers occurs in the journal kept by the elder sisters in September of 1837. On the

⁶⁵*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, January 2, 1841, p. 214.

⁶⁶*Journal of Meetings*, WRHS V B 135.

14th of that month, Olive Gates moved to the second house to help Adah Potter care for the "little girls." Adah apparently left this position for a short time as an April 1838 entry indicates that she "returned to the 2nd house to take charge of the little girls." At the same time, Olive Gates was "released." No other entries in this journal record the appointment or release of caretakers until March of 1840 when Harriet Goodwin "left staying as secondary caretaker," suggesting that perhaps she was the sister appointed to take Olive's place sometime after April 1838. In 1841, when the little girls and older girls began living together in the east house, Harriet was again mentioned as a caretaker as she and Amy Reed moved to the east house to take "care of the girls," presumably the older ones. Five weeks later, Elizabeth Bates was placed as assistant with the little girls, replacing a sister Rhoda who is noted as being "quite feeble." In December of the same year, Elizabeth Lovegrove replaced Adah Potter as first caretaker of the youngest girls. The entries for the next thirty years are less frequent, suggesting two possible alternatives: more longevity and consistency of caretakers in this role or less attention paid to recording the passage of girls' caretakers in and out of the order. In October of 1845, Matilda Reed left her position of caretaker and Mary Wicks took her place.⁶⁷ Eleven years later in 1856, Eliza Sharp is noted as leaving "her lot as caretaker of the girls"; Anna Dodgson took over as caretaker with Abigail Hathaway as her assistant. In August a year later, Sally Bushnell went to the girls' order as assistant to Anna and

⁶⁷*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, September 14, 1837; April 26, 1838; March 21, 1840; January 2, February 12, & December 2, 1841; pp. 195, 197, 206, 214, 215, 220; *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 61, October 4, 1845.

Abigail left.⁶⁸ While no record was made of Anna's leaving her position, when Sally Bushnell died in December 1865, Anna returned as caretaker, suggesting perhaps that only one caretaker was now needed or feasible.⁶⁹

Shaker sisters had a monthly work pattern based on housekeeping rotations rather than the structured work apprenticeships and the seasonal farm work of the male youth. Small groups of girls worked with one or two adult women at a time instead of the one-on-one approach used for teaching trades to the male youth. Monthly "tours" in housekeeping, the kitchens and bakery, the wash house, dairy, and weave shops kept the women from getting bored and added variety to the work, as well as taught the young sisters "to act like women in their work."⁷⁰ Isaac Youngs described the occupation of the girls in his journal summation for 1860:

The girls do abundance of braiding for binding of poplar leaf work. They knit & sew, work in the kitchen, make paper & cloth seed bags. Make and mend their own clothes, do many kinds of little jobs, going here & there to help the older sisters where wanted and do much marking of clothes & handkerchiefs. Also in the summer season go to school.⁷¹

Gathering berries and other fruits and vegetables for jams and preserves were other pleasant summer tasks for children, especially when combined with a hay ride. During the canning season, girls were excused from school to help put up the hundreds of

⁶⁸Youngs, *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 71, December 25 & 27, 1856; August 20, 1857.

⁶⁹Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, April 10, 1866.

⁷⁰Bates, *Journal*, WRHS V B 128, July 7, 1833.

⁷¹Youngs, *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 71, 1860.

jars of jam, condiments, and applesauce both for sale and use. Girls also mended, carded wool and flax, and knit stockings.⁷²

Deaconesses' records support this description such as those made mid-nineteenth century reporting that twelve year old Adaline Cantrell "marked" or stitched 45 identifying letters in the family's linens or clothing in three hours one January day in 1850, and that two slightly older girls made a "largeman's shirt."⁷³ In April, the girls and their two caretakers are noted as working "at the east kitchen, spinning mops & carding." During the summer of 1851, the "wash house girls" dyed the cotton and wool worsted fabric blue for later use as sisters' dresses or brothers' trousers.⁷⁴

Eldress Sadie Neale's life is one example of how the concept of usefulness influenced the tasks of small children. Indentured by her foster parents in 1855, six year-old Sister Sadie's first task was the braiding of palm leaf for sale table mats. She and a few other girls under age ten all had small hand-loom and worked together in the girls' shop with their caretaker and an adult sister braiding palm leaf for tablemats and bonnets. As she grew more proficient she worked in the bonnet industry, weaving the straw braids that formed the front edges of the bonnet on her small Shaker-made loom. Throughout her long lifetime with the Shakers, Sadie continued to use her weaving skills to make

⁷²Youngs, *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 71.

⁷³Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, January 1850.

⁷⁴Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, April 1850, August 1851.

products both to meet the sect's needs and to sell to people outside the community.⁷⁵

Girls also made a vital economic contribution to the Church Family by augmenting the labor force in the primary occupations and producing goods for sale. The seed and herb businesses were economic mainstays of the New Lebanon Church Family during much of the nineteenth century; all children and youth worked to print, cut, fold, and fill the numerous seed and herb packets needed for later distribution throughout the country. Betsy Crosman started recording the "sale work done by those in the girls' order" in her record book in 1865. For that year, she indicates that the girls contributed 16,600 paper and 49 cotton seed bags, 280 "tomatoe marena cushions," another 1820 "velvet marena cushions," 86 yards of 6-strand palmleaf braid, 90 pairs of "turkey wings," 15 quarts of "picked out" walnuts, and several days of dandelion picking.⁷⁶ The Church office record for 1860 credits the children and their caretakers with making 109 cloth and 27,226 paper seed bags, nearly one-tenth of those made that year. In addition to seed bags, children made 229 face braids and 1,254 cushion linings for sale.⁷⁷ In 1861, they produced even more: 449 round, 1600 square and 110 tomato pin cushions; 48 wing and feather dusters; and 167 yards of palm leaf braid for bonnets. They also picked

⁷⁵ Andrews and Andrews, *Fruits of the Shaker Tree*, p. 87.

⁷⁶ Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, 1865. Betsy Crosman was a family deaconess at this time and recorded the girls' sale work for five years beginning in 1865.

⁷⁷ *A Journal Kept by the Deaconesses at the Office* (New Lebanon, NY, 1830-1871), Andrews Collection, SA 894. Because separate records for the sisters and brethren activities were kept by the deacons and deaconesses, and with the collaboration of other primary documents, it is safe to assume that "children" in this journal are those in the girls' order and do not include boys. See also Edward Deming Andrews, "The Community Industries of the Shakers," *New York State Museum Handbook Number 15* (University of the State of New York, 1933); Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*.

dandelions for three weeks, perhaps for the famous Shaker dandelion wine sold to the world.⁷⁸ Under caretakers Elizabeth Cantrell and Robena Gothra, the girls' work in 1867 amounted to record highs: 6680 cushions, 286,200 paper and 50 cloth seed bags, 20 pair of turkey wings, 150 yards of braid, and 30 quarts of cleaned butternut meats.⁷⁹

The idea of cleanliness was incorporated into every task, including children's, because Shakers believed their village and buildings were a reflection of their inner spiritual world.⁸⁰ Mother Ann had told Believers to "clean your rooms well; for good spirits will not live where there is dirt. There is not dirt in heaven."⁸¹ Shakers took this advice literally and expected even little girls and boys to do their work according to the standards set by Mother Ann. In their 1904 Shaker history, Anna White and Leila Taylor recounted a story about one of the childhood lessons Eldress Harriet Bullard learned about cleanliness:

She had at one time the care of a dark corner closet, into which people seldom looked. One day, being in haste, she brushed it carelessly, thinking, "It does not matter if it is not clean, no one ever looks in here." Just then, as she looked, an eye appeared. It came to her at once as a lesson and a token that the angels saw all that she did, whether in the dark or in the light, and from that time it became her fixed practice to do all her work, even in the dark, well enough for the angels to see.⁸²

⁷⁸*Office Journal*, Andrews Collection, SA 894, 1861.

⁷⁹Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, 1867.

⁸⁰June Sprigg, *By Shaker Hands* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 107.

⁸¹[Bishop and Wells] Testimony of Lucy Bishop, *Testimonies*, p. 265.

⁸²White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, p. 365.

While daily life in the girls' order was focused on work, girls did have outings similar to the boys' and opportunities for play, especially before they reached the age of seven when accountability for "sins of commission" was taken seriously. Always in the forefront of Shaker practice, however, were the teachings and attitudes of Ann Lee.

Mother Ann's early counsel to parents in Shirley, Massachusetts, advised them against giving their children "idols and foolish toys," believing that "such things would shut out the gift of God from their souls."⁸³ Children, she believed, should be carefully guarded from the senseless playthings and practices of the world, and be appropriately instructed by their parents in the gospel teachings. "When I was a child," Ann told them, "my mind was taken up with the things of God, so that I saw heavenly visions, instead of trifling toys."⁸⁴

Dolls especially were eschewed as playthings for girls. One very young Shaker sister at Watervliet described the reasoning behind this: "The instinctive maternal feelings was systematically crushed out in little girls; a good Believer never thought of the word "mother" save in a spiritual sense; it was a name and feeling not to be tolerated in the flesh. . ."⁸⁵

Mother Ann's early views about children's toys did not stop children from inventing their own playthings. When a little girl at the Watervliet community was

⁸³[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 37.

⁸⁴[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 37.

⁸⁵[Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," p. 29-30.

forced to "renounce" her worldly doll, she instead "made a corn-cob wrapped in a bit of muslin, with a chestnut-shell cap on the smaller end, the confidant of my troubles and sharer of my joys; and the little illegitimate was soon as dear to my heart as my waxen-faced, gayly-dressed doll had been."⁸⁶ The same young Shakeress described her happy youthful afternoons spent playing beneath a bridge over the creek and creating her own toys, courtesy of Mother Nature:

What pleasant times those were! We wandered the great garden, and if we found a bird's nest, we would rush and gather strawberries, and choke the fledglings by lovingly stuffing the finest ripe fruit down their throats. Hiding beneath an arcade of the bridge which spanned the dear old creek, we would pull off shoes and stockings, and wade knee-deep in the cool, bright water. Then, loading our long palm-leaf Shaker bonnets with dandelions, which, grown to seed, looked like little white-capped Shakeresses, we would float them down the stream in a race, the boat which won being decorated with buttercups and violets. What mud-pies we made and baked in the sun! What fun we had secreting golden kernels of corn in clam-shells and peeping from our hiding-place to see the chickens find them and peck them up, firmly believing that they "gave thanks" when they turned their bills up to heaven after sipping water. These were happy days. We had no world's toys, but were just as contented with our corn-cob dolls, clam-shell plates, acorn-top cups, and chicken coops for baby houses.⁸⁷

One event that may have brought particular excitement to the children's lives was the passage of the circus by the New Lebanon village. An elder sister recorded in her journal for October 23, 1843, that "a caravan of wild beasts went by here this forenoon, which was a great sight to us, altho' we could see but a small part which was 4 Elephants, & two Camels. The rest were in the covered carriages of which there were 19 pretty

⁸⁶[Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," p. 31-32.

⁸⁷[Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," pp. 36-37.

close in succession."⁸⁸

Conclusion

Overall, daily life for Shaker children was safe, secure, and predictable. Caretakers attempted to balance work and worship with enough recreation and free time to reduce the tedium. In reality, the physical life of Shaker children probably differed very little from the life of other rural children, and was, perhaps, even better in some respects. In the Shaker villages, food was usually plentiful and well prepared; most children had playmates and comrades of their own age who were always close by; children had excellent opportunities to learn one or more trades from expert craftsmen; and, as will be seen in the next chapter, Shaker schools were as good or better than those in the surrounding districts. What might have been lacking was the natural affection bond between parents and children, the knowledge of being loved as an offspring and the security one can often find in being part of a nuclear family. Caretakers did not seem to be revered for their warmth and lovingness; rather, they carefully and most often impersonally provided the physical care a child needed, but perhaps left the child's emotional needs unsatisfied. In addition, the frequent changes in caretakers made it difficult for the children to become emotionally close to an one adult, especially in the girls' order.

With the exception of their adult caretakers, school teachers, and the boys'

⁸⁸*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 61, October 23, 1843.

apprenticeship "mentors," children did not often mingle or work with adults. The Shaker leadership seemed determined to keep all possible affectional ties from developing between adults and children because they believed that worldly relationships interfered with worshipping God.⁸⁹ Such strict segregation and frequent changes may have later contributed to so few children converting at adulthood; by more often allowing meaningful relationships to evolve between adults and children, the Shakers could have perhaps communicated more of the Shaker spiritual values to the children and enhanced the emotional bond between themselves and the youth upon whom they were so dependent.

⁸⁹[Anonymous], "Fifteen Years," p. 33, 196.

CHAPTER FIVE. EDUCATION OF SHAKER CHILDREN

Introduction

The most important function of education was to keep Shaker children "close up" and "in the gift." Keeping children "close up" and "in the gift" meant that all aspects of education from "book learning" to apprenticeships had to reinforce the positive features of Shakerism and induce children to convert to the Society at adulthood.¹ Conformity, not individuality, seemed to be the guiding precept. Practical training in farming, skilled trades, and domestic skills formed the basis of the educational system throughout the nineteenth century. After 1817 children attended gender segregated schools run by the Shakers in two four- month cycles, but even there the emphasis was on learning that would be useful to the Society.² Shaker schools were firmly established with the 1820 appointment of Brother Seth Youngs Wells as overseer of Shaker schools and all writings, and in time, Superintendent of Shaker Schools.³ The schools flourished during this middle period or the "golden age," but declined as did the Society after the Civil War.

¹Elkins, *Fifteen Years*, p. 30.

²[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, pp. 44-46.

³Seth Y. Wells was "among the first that gathered to the Gospel" in Watervliet, and was the oldest son of the extensive Wells family from Long Island, New York. He was a "leading character" of the Watervliet Gathering Order when it was directed by the New Lebanon ministry. Wells was 30 years old when he joined the sect, having been a rather studious child, especially of literature. His father, who did not join the Society, provided him "regular schooling," leading to his receiving a high school or "Academic education," where "he became thoroughly proficient in the English language, was well versed in Greek and Latin & had considerable knowledge of the French tongue." Clough, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, pp. 29-32.

Educational Beginnings: 1787 - 1820*The Indenture or Apprenticeship System*

In both New England and the Shaker communities, apprenticeships generally, lasted from seven to fourteen years or until a youth was able to be on his or her own -- usually age twenty-one for males and age sixteen for females.⁴ The apprentice system of the Society had two important differences than the apprentice system of the wider culture. In the larger society, apprenticeships bound only a person's time, not the person himself.⁵ Inherent in the apprenticeship system from its inception in America was the explicit expectation of release at the end of one's bound time and the implicit expectation of establishing one's physical and economic independence in the larger community. For middle-class children this was the norm; for poor children, this was a "step-up" in the world and was often their only avenue to potential economic independence. In the Shaker Society, however, the intent of apprenticeships or indentures was to bind the person to the sect after the term of apprenticeship was completed. Implicit in the Shaker indentures was the expectation of dependence and "giving back" to the sect by the commitment of one's life. These differences become important points in assessing the effectiveness of the apprenticeship system as a means of gaining life converts to Shakerism.

⁴Geraldine Youcha, *Minding the Children: Child Care in America from the Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1995), p. 19.

⁵Youcha, *Minding the Children*, p. 26.

The indentures of Shaker children usually specified a trade or trades that the youth would learn, from those of farming and housekeeping to highly marketable trades of tailoring or carpentry. In both the larger culture and in the Shaker sect, the apprenticeship system for males was a more formal system than the one for females. In the Society, boys were assigned to one of the brethren and worked, lodged, and ate with him, often for several years or the duration of his indenture. Girls rotated work with a variety of sisters, learning all the trades and skills necessary to sustain a family. This system, while it was meant to prepare youth to provide for *Believers'* needs and to assume positions of leadership within the sect, also prepared the male youth to be highly qualified to achieve worldly economic independence and the female youth to marry and raise their own families. Given the strictures of Shaker life, and the assumptions and expectations of freedom inherent in the apprenticeship system itself, it is little wonder that so many youth left the sect when they came of age.

Early Efforts of Formal Education

The formal education, or "book learning," of children was severely hampered in the years before 1787, primarily because Believers were widely scattered and usually illiterate. Isaac Youngs described Believers during these early years as "not in a condition to pay much attention to letter learning, nor to establish schools for their children." Thus education was, "unavoidably, pretty much neglected for several years."⁶

⁶Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 364.

During Meacham's leadership of the sect between 1787 and 1796, those who gathered into the early family groups and had the necessary resources, were instructed to "carefully and punctually" attend to their children's education, especially in religious matters. In "way-marks," Meacham laid out his "instructions concerning the education of youth & children":

It is the duty of the Church to instruct the youth & children that are under their care, in all things that may be for their own good and the good of others; but it ought to be done in order. As to trades and occupations, they ought to be instructed in those that are the most suitable to their abilities and genius, so far as may be for their protection and may be given them according to the order and ability of the Church.

But in relation to letter or any other learning that may be necessary for the young; their age and natural abilities and the manner of their faith ought to be considered. It is not order to give one the same measure of instructions at fifteen as they would another at twenty years of age, if their natural abilities are equal, according to their age; but they ought to be instructed according to their age. Neither is it good order to give one of a lesser ability the same measure of instruction as one of a greater : a vessel cannot contain any more than its measure.⁷

According to Youngs, the children among the gathered "had some opportunity to acquire the leading branches of education, reading, writing and arithmetic" even though the Shakers' "provisions and means were very limited."⁸ The education of the children assumed a subordinate role to stabilizing the organizational and economic foundation of the Society. Whatever types of instruction the children did receive were shaped by the words of Joseph Meacham: "we are not called to labor to excell [sic], or to be like the

⁷[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, p. 44.

⁸Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 366.

world; but to excel in order, union and peace, and in good works -- works that are truly virtuous and useful to man, in this life."⁹

From 1800 to 1810, the number of children in the Church Family fell sharply and no new young children joined the Order.¹⁰ According to Isaac Youngs, education early in this decade was again "nearly or quite neglected" as it had been before 1790.¹¹ With few children in the Society, an explicit program of study was conceivably of minor importance, or at least, not meritorious of being recorded.

After Meacham's death, and with the basic design of the Society in place and the economic foundation solid, Mother Lucy undertook another attempt to spread the Shaker gospel and add converts, especially children, to the fold. Wright realized, perhaps more than other early leaders, that the sect's present and future economic success depended more on cooperative coexistence with those outside the Society rather than total and hostile rejection of them. Because of their vows of celibacy, Shakers had no choice but to endure complete dependency on worldly converts for labor as well as longevity.

One result of Wright's evolving rapprochement was the publication of major theological and historical writings, as well as the vastly increased distribution of such

⁹[Bishop], *Joseph Meacham*, WRHS VII B 59, pp. 45-46.

¹⁰Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 212. This author states that in 1790, 17.9 % of the males in the Church Family were under sixteen and 27.1 % of the females. In 1795, these percentages fell to 3.3 and 8.2, respectively. From 1800 to 1810, no children under sixteen appear in the records. In 1810, the statistics indicate 4.4% of the males and 3.8% of the females were under sixteen. The percentage of children comprising Church Family membership generally increased after 1810, with the proportion peaking at about one third in 1855. After 1855, the combined percentage falls to 17.1% by 1870, rises sharply to 27.6% in the next decade, and again falls back to 17.4% by 1900.

¹¹Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 366.

works to the world's people. Publication of these, and other writings attempting to simplify or perhaps distill Shaker beliefs, were bids to enhance Shakerism in the eyes of New Englanders, thus enticing more to join. The first of these publications, Benjamin Seth Youngs' *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, appeared in 1808 during one of the lesser peaks of revivalism in New York state and was, presumably, aimed at those involved in this resurgence of evangelical emotionalism, the goal being to attract more of those adults and children spiritually dissatisfied to the Shaker fold.¹²

The first attempts at education focused on the adults, perhaps because so few children belonged to the Children's Order at this time. Late in 1808, Wright and the Ministry "labored . . . to have the Believers correct their awkward habits, particularly in the manner of speaking." Evening schools for all ages were introduced. Taught by the few educated Shaker brethren, they instructed in the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, with "the younger part . . . instructed to read with propriety."¹³ But the

¹²Frank G. Taylor, *An Analysis of Shaker Education: The Life and Death of an Alternative Educational System, 1774-1950* (University of Connecticut: unpublished dissertation, 1976), pp. 63-69. According to Taylor this first "historical, philosophical and, theological tract" was "designed to codify Shaker belief. . . . It attempted to organize Biblical and European history and tried to show that Biblical prophesy predicted the emergence of Shaker belief." While less than 10% was a record of "Shaker personalities or communal happenings," it contained many of the oral stories and legends of Mother Ann Lee. Thomas Jefferson read it three times, calling this work "the finest ecclesiastical history that had been written." "If the principles contained in that book were maintained and carried out," he wrote, "it would overthrow all false religions." Youngs' 1808 version was edited with Seth Youngs Wells, and released again in 1810. A third revised edition by Youngs and McNemar followed in 1823. The final edition by Youngs and Calvin Green was released in 1856. The main concepts do not change from one edition to another but new evidence is presented to strengthen the position "that it was the duty and privilege of the church to build upon the foundation of the apostolic experience. . . . Union, oneness, harmony, and equity" were the guiding principles.

¹³*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, November 30, 1808, p. 52.

primary thrust of these evening classes was toward gaining "some better knowledge of speaking . . . [and to] speak with more propensity."¹⁴ Concerned with what she deemed to be negative worldly influences in speech and the impact such rough mannerisms might have on gaining educated and influential converts, as well as their negative impact on the youth's behavior, Lucy wanted to eliminate vulgarisms, nicknames, worldly titles, and shortcuts in pronunciation.¹⁵

Perhaps because of an ambivalent attitude toward being "regulated," after a few weeks the adult lessons "rested again, for about four years." Whether this first educational attempt to remold Shakers was considered a success remains unknown, but regardless of triumph or failure with the adults, daily time was henceforth devoted to the basic instruction of reading and spelling for the few children in the Church Family.¹⁶

A second attempt at establishing orderly education began during the winter months of 1813 and 1814 when Lucy reinstated the evening schools, again teaching the "common branches" to both children and adults. In 1815 the first day school, held in the afternoon and specifically for children, supplemented the now "regular" evening class. In

¹⁴Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, pp. 366-367.

¹⁵Youngs *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 366; Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, pp. 82-83.

¹⁶New Lebanon was not the first Shaker community to organize education for the children. The town of Enfield, Connecticut, voted on December 3, 1792 to allow the Shakers to create their own school district and gave them their proportional share of the school tax money. In the Canterbury Shaker community, John Bishop conducted a boys' school for 20 minutes a day during the sisters' lunch time, beginning in the 1790s. The daytime sessions focused on reading and spelling and two evening sessions each week focused on penmanship. John Whitcher, one of the original pupils, started a girls' school in 1806 that met six evenings a week for penmanship lessons. Taylor, *Shaker Education*, pp.143-145.

1816, "verbal instructions in good manners" were added to the children's other lessons.¹⁷

During the last four years of this period (1816-1820), the public school in New Lebanon was organized, culminating with the appointment of Seth Y. Wells as overseer of all the schools and publications. By 1817, the "number of children had so increased not only in the Church but in the out families," that a public school was established "to which all children in the society might come."¹⁸ Youngs indicates that this school was first held in the "former" meeting house, located at the far north end of the Church buildings, although this location is questionable. Other primary sources indicate that the "old north shop" was "fitted up" in 1817 to be the first school house. An October 1822 journal entry by a Church Family elders states that "the old meeting house was moved to the North, in order to make room for the new meeting house . . . the old one is to be improved for public worship, until the new one shall be prepared & ready for that purpose, & then to be used for a school house." The first services were held in the new meeting house on June 20, 1824.¹⁹ At this time, the north shop was probably vacated and the school relocated to the old meeting house.

In addition to reading, "ciphering," and arithmetic, the children's school curriculum included some geography, grammar, and "miscellaneous" subjects with a strong emphasis on "good manners." Systematic but varied exercises and recitations

¹⁷Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, pp. 366-367.

¹⁸Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 368.

¹⁹*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, October 5, 1822 & June 20, 1824, pp. 96, 101.

ordered the youth's daily program of study, but again these were geared for usefulness rather than the development of youngsters individual aptitudes.²⁰ Children received "instruction proportioned to their genius, talents and capacities for usefulness," but any knowledge or "classical learning" beyond the basics was considered by the Ministry "mere lumber of the brain" and precluded more useful instruction.

The belief by many parents who left their children in the Shakers' care that they would be better cared for and raised "more morally" was supported by the Shakers' commitment to educating children and training Shaker teachers.²¹ Wells summed up this commitment in his treatise on the "government of children":

As we have many children brought in among us from time to time, who must be governed, instructed and brought up by us, either for the gospel of Christ or for the world, it appears to me a matter of utmost importance that we discharge our duty to them in a manner best calculated to train them up in the way of God, and make them fit subjects for the Kingdom of Heaven.²²

In April of 1819, the Commissioner of the Common Schools in New Lebanon, "divided . . . the town into Districts" making the Shaker community part of District #12. Slightly less than a year later, the first two Church Family teachers, Garret R. Lawrence and Isaac N. Youngs, received teaching certificates, attesting that they possessed "good moral character, and sufficient learning and ability, and are in all other respects, well

²⁰Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, pp. 368-370.

²¹[Wells], *Plain Statement*, pp. 2-3.

²²Seth Y. Wells, *Government of Children* (New Lebanon, NY, [n.d.]), WRHS VII B 53.

qualified to teach a common school."²³

Seth Youngs Wells (1767-1847), an articulate and forceful Shaker writer and speaker, is credited with being the architect of the Shaker school system.²⁴ A 1799 convert and former teacher in the Albany City School and principal teacher at the Hudson Academy, Brother Wells of the Watervliet community was formally appointed by Mother Lucy in 1820 "to assist in the organization, & arrangement of Schools, & to teach the proper method of instruction." In addition, as membership and publications grew, Wells was a "very able assistant in arranging & correcting Believers first Publications, & in fact, nearly all their Publications up to the time of his decease." His formal role was now as "Superintendent of Believers' Literature, Schools, & c. in the first Bishopric" as well as assisting other societies as was practical.²⁵ This appointment had a two-fold purpose. First, it marked the most serious attempt by Shakers to strictly protect the Shaker image as seen by the world. Secondly, Wells was in charge of developing a methodical but highly edited educational program for the children, new converts, and the Society as a whole.

²³*School Record for District No. 12 Town of New Lebanon* (New Lebanon, NY, 1819-1850), WRHS I V 32, pp. 1-3.

²⁴White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, pp. 132-133.

²⁵Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, pp. 32-33.

Seth Youngs Wells and the Growth of Shaker Education: 1821 - 1860

New Lebanon community membership increased in the 1820s and 1830s, mostly due to Wright's efforts; the ranks of the Children's Order swelled in proportion to the adult sectors.²⁶ The school classes for the opening years of this period attest to this rapid increase: in 1821, ninety children ages five to fifteen were taught, fifty-seven of which resided in the Shaker community; in 1822, eighty-eight were taught, forty-nine of which were Shaker children; and in 1823, sixty-four of the ninety-seven children receiving schooling were Shakers.²⁷ But with a larger community, the need for maintaining order also expanded. Three different approaches to governance seem to have been attempted: a subtle reinterpretation of Shaker doctrine, stricter regulations on behavior, and education or socialization aimed at producing conformity.

Shaker Doctrine

Mother Ann's original contention that each Shaker was an individual instrument of God, "traveling" his own path in harmonious and natural union with other Shakers, needed to be subtly reformulated to create and maintain order in the rapidly growing sect. Life in a large family of fifty to one hundred members, and in a Society approaching four thousand members, dictated that singularity give way to conformity. Partially because of the rapidly growing number of members and the need to keep control, and partly because

²⁶Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 212.

²⁷*School Record*, WRHS I B 32, pp. 5-11.

success depended on ordering all the members into one coherent and consistent whole, individual inspiration had to be sublimated to the dictates of the Lead Ministry. The Lead Ministry, and the elders under their influence, now discouraged independent "gifts" -- manifestations of the power of God acting within -- from all Shakers, preferring and enforcing a much broader separation of power between the ministerial level and the common Shaker. Only "gifts" deemed good for the Society as a whole were recognized and encouraged, "gifts" that enhanced homogeneity rather than originality.²⁸ The concept of union no longer seemed to be built first on spiritual oneness, but on compliance to decree. This was done partially through the first public issuance of Shaker written orders -- the *Millennial Laws*.

Millennial Laws

During Wright's ministration from 1796 to 1821, formal communal rules evolved from the verbal instructions of Lee and Meacham to a concrete form of written orders. Mother Lucy strongly objected to this "compilation" even for the elders because "the on-going development of the communities would be adversely affected by a body of laws which might tend all too easily to become crystallized and unchanging." Sometime before her death in 1821, Freegift Wells of Watervliet compiled the orders, arranging them under specific headings, and "presented them to Mother Lucy with the suggestion that they be read in meeting." She "promptly rejected" this idea but six months to the day

²⁸Green, *Biographic Memoir*, WRHS VI B 27, pp. 51-56.

of her death, the first edition of the *Millennial Laws* was published, signaling a heightened emphasis on control and conformity.²⁹

Before her death, Wright had "chosen and appointed" her successors in the Ministry: Elder Ebenzar Bishop, Brother Rufus Bishop, Sister Ruth Landon, and Sister Asenath Clark.³⁰ Contrary to Mother Lucy's wishes, but meeting the growing needs for control and obedience, this new Ministry circulated written copies of the *Millennial Laws* among the elders of the bishoprics. The *Laws* were read with regularity in meetings until all the members had committed them to memory and to action.³¹ "Union" and "order" moved from the spiritual domain to the temporal domain; as such, union and order were, in reality, a growing body of rules and regulations established by the Lead Ministry and strictly followed by the common members.

Beginning in August of 1837 and lasting for about fifteen years, with the Society still under the leadership installed after Mother Lucy's death, an internal spiritual revival called "Mother Ann's Work" began with a group of young girls in the Watervliet Gathering Order and eventually spread, in varying degrees of intensity, to the other

²⁹Johnson, "Millennial Laws 1821," pp. 35-37. Johnson, of the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, states that "it is surprising how great a sense of sufficiency one finds in the laws of 1821. They reflect the relatively simple life to which the early Believers had been led. Certainly it is true that the way of life makes the rule and not the rule that creates a way of life. In these *Millennial Laws* we see a phase of development in which life itself was not as complicated as it was to become later" (p. 43).

³⁰*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, p. 91.

³¹Johnson, "Millennial Laws 1821," p. 37.

Shaker villages.³² The concept of "gifts," especially those of a spiritually moving nature, had never disappeared from the sect, and during this period there was a marked increase both in the reception of such gifts and in their variety.

Publications written during this era reflect its essential, but opposite, components of mysticism, individual gifts, control, and conformity. According to one contemporary author, the 1845 edition of the *Millennial Laws* contain the "fullest expression of the corporate asceticism" of this period. Expanded orders "sharpened the boundaries between the society and the world, raised the standards of purity among the Believers, and enlarged the areas of supervision by the leaders." It was, in essence, "a systematic attempt to reform and regulate the total environment of the Shakers."³³

The Shakers themselves consider these 1845 *Laws*

solely a product of that era of spiritual ferment and searching in which they were written. . . . There is no evidence that the *Laws* continued to be given even token observance after the works of spirit manifestation began their decline. There is on the contrary much to indicate that the *Laws* themselves were symbolic indications of the fact that the era of Mother's Work had reached its peak and that the psychic would play an increasingly less important part in the life of Believers. The *Laws* are, in short, perhaps the final attempt of those most closely associated with the spirit manifestations to turn the tide of disinterest and distrust which was making itself so evident. Like most rear guard actions it seems to have proved to have been a highly unsuccessful attempt at redeeming a lost cause.³⁴

³²Ebenezer Bishop (1768-1849), Rufus Bishop (1774-1852), Ruth Landon (1774-1850), and Asenath Clark (1779-1857) all served in the Ministry's lot a New Lebanon during the period in which the spirit manifestations were at their peak. . . . the Ministry's average age at the issuance of the *Millennial Laws* of 1845 was over 71." Johnson, "Rules and Orders," p. 142, note 7. See also Stein, *Shaker Adventure*, p. 213.

³³Stein, *Shaker Experience*, pp. 165-187, 198-199.

³⁴Johnson, "Rules and Orders," pp.140-141.

School Education

About this time, the number of treatises on the proper education and conduct of children increased, mostly penned by Seth Wells. Building on his earlier publication, *A plain statement of the custom and manner of receiving, managing, teaching, governing and disciplining children*, Wells published several new essays, including *Government of children* and *Remarks on the necessity of reforming the morals and improving the religious condition of our youth and children*. Franklin Barber, a New Lebanon school teacher, added his own publication: *Reflections on the Government and Care of Children*.³⁵

In the summer of 1823, Wells began a series of visits to the other eastern communities "to encourage their programs of education and to establish schools."³⁶ He not only instructed and demonstrated teaching techniques to the brethren and sisters in these communities, he also conducted short model schools. One purpose of his visits was to help ensure consistency and order in their schools, two of the principles so important to the Shakers.³⁷

The child's ability to govern oneself, Wells believed, preceded the ability to benefit from moral and literary instruction. "To give children literary instructions," he

³⁵[Wells], *Plain Statement*, WRHS VII B 62; Wells, *Government of Children*, WRHS VII B 53; [Wells], *Remarks*, WRHS VII B 66; Franklin Barber, *Reflections on the Government & Care of Children* (New Lebanon, NY, 1843), WRHS VII A 6.

³⁶Joyce Taylor, "Joseph Lancaster and the Origins of the Lancastrian System of Education," *The Shaker Quarterly* 19, 3 (Fall 1991), p. 71.

³⁷Taylor, *Shaker Education*, pp. 156-157.

wrote, "without . . . teaching them to govern the natural propensities and dispositions of their minds, and without instructing them in moral virtue, would be a ready way to lead them to ruin."³⁸ The elders viewed knowledge not properly disseminated and directed as dangerous to the Society. The Shakers did not want to create youthful scholars, but rather sought to channel the energy and activity of the youth for the benefit of the sect. The aim of all children's instruction, both moral and "letter learning," was always and above all usefulness, not for oneself, but for the good of the Society. "This life is short at the longest," Wells wrote, "and ought not to be spent in acquiring any kind of knowledge which can not be put to good use."³⁹

Wells also formalized the pattern of schooling. Boys attended school during the four winter months of November to March, months not devoted to farming, and the girls during a similar four month summer period, "each sex [varying] from about thirty to sixty," one indication of how much the Church Family had grown in the ensuing years.⁴⁰ Not only did this system keep the sexes separate, it was also an efficient use of the building, materials, and equipment. The winter months of schooling for the boys helped to keep them busy during the physically inactive months of the year. Otherwise, wrote Wells, the boys might employ their time "in talking nonsense, rolling about the floor, scuffling, pulling and hauling each other . . . tearing their clothes or rambling where they

³⁸Seth Y. Wells and Calvin Green, "Remarks Upon Inspired Writings" (n.d.), in Giles B. Avery, Collection of Miscellaneous Writings (New Lebanon, NY, 1827-1890), WRHS VII A 6.

³⁹Wells, "Remarks on Learning," Andrews Collection, SA 770.

⁴⁰Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 369.

have no business and corrupting themselves and each other in body and mind."⁴¹

Wells' viewpoints on children were complex and possibly contradictory. While many of his writings reflect a gentle approach to teaching children, his choice and implementation of teaching methods and several of his other writings suggests a harsher or much more restrictive view of children's nature and their governance.

Wells' Gentle Approach to Children

On one hand, Wells seemed to have had a good understanding of children's needs and attempted to transfer this appreciation to the teachers and community. In a letter to the elders at Watervliet, for instance, he reminded them that "children are active, sprightly, natural people who easily learn by chance, accident, and improper actions, and that frequently it is difficult to tell when something is learned." Not only did he encourage adult and visitor attendance at the Shaker schools, believing this would "tend to excite the ambition of children, and keep their attention alive to their studies," it would also "serve as one of the best means of encouraging the school and adding strength and assistance to the Teachers Labours."⁴²

Believing that "conducting a school demanded great wisdom," Wells elevated the status of the teacher in the Shaker community and tried to create an environment essential

⁴¹Seth Y. Wells, "Communication to the Elders, Deacons and Trustees in the United Societies" (New Lebanon, NY, 1844). Quoted in Taylor, *Shaker Education*, p. 170.

⁴²Taylor, *Shaker Education*, p. 162.

to learning. A positive teacher-student relationship was critical, according to Wells. "If scholars cannot love their teachers," he wrote, "they will not love their school and consequently are in no situation to learn much by their instruction."⁴³ Teachers were also urged to follow Wells' advice to caretakers about disciplining children, taking into account the "natural disposition of the children and other concomitant circumstances":

If the child is of a tender feeling and disposition, and easily wrought upon, a gentle admonition for a fault is sufficient. If [the child is] more hard to be wrought upon, the admonition must be proportionally severe. If of a careless and forgetful disposition, some thing made use of to refresh the memory such as a string or rag round the finger is found beneficial. If the child is of a lofty spirit, and regardless of admonition, and yet not so stubborn and refractory as to require the rod, kneeling in presence of the family, either in the time of worship, or at the table, will often have a good effect. If inclined to be imprudent and saucy a lecture in the presence of the family has often had the desired effect. Sometimes a badge of disgrace upon the back, or a badge of honour upon the breast, such as a label with the words, good or bad boy, has had the effect of deterring children from vice, or of stimulating them in their duty.⁴⁴

As Superintendent, Wells expanded Meacham and Wrights' emphasis on good habits and usefulness, as befitted the children "for business in the Society of Believers." Wells placed great importance on the power of imitation, admonishing not only the caretakers and teachers, but all brothers and sisters to "show forth good examples in conduct and conversation. One bad example in word or deed," he announced, "is liable to make a lasting impression on the mind of the child that hears or sees it. . . .

I would seriously and earnestly urge upon every Brother and sister in the Society

⁴³Seth Y. Wells, *School Instruction* (New Lebanon, NY, 1844), WRHS VII A 14. Quoted in Taylor, *Shaker Education*, p. 167.

⁴⁴[Wells], *Plain Statement*, WRHS VII B 62, pp. 10-11.

the necessity & importance of carefully setting a good example at all times, and in all things . . . I have full confidence in the faithfulness of the Elders and teachers of this society; but it will be in vain for Elders & Teachers to instruct, reprove or admonish the young, unless the older members second their labours by a steady and uniform practice of good examples.⁴⁵

These "milder modes of government " and the "virtuous example set before them" would eventually, Wells claimed, "yield a willing obedience" such that they "cannot be induced by any persuasions of their former friends or even of their parents to be separated from us."⁴⁶ Unfortunately for the sect, either the quality relationships deemed to be so vital were not formed, or, if they were, failed to keep the youth from leaving for the world at adulthood.

The Lancastrian System of Education and Wells' Contradictory View of Children

Wells also was a strong advocate of the Lancastrian system, designed by English Quaker Joseph Lancaster to teach large numbers of children. This system was most "effective in the teaching of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and catechism."⁴⁷ Lessons and knowledge were divided into small units and students learned to read from wall charts or book pages, one page at a time, by endless repetition. The June 1918 *Educational Review* rated the Lancastrian system as "one of the most important factors in

⁴⁵Wells, "Circular Address," Andrews Collection, SA 951.1.

⁴⁶[Wells], *Plain Statement*, WRHS VII B 62, p. 10.

⁴⁷William E. Drake, *The American School in Transition* (New York, NY: Prentice-Hall, 1955), p. 151. Quoted in Taylor, *Shaker Education*, p. 152.

education in England and America in the first half of the nineteenth century."⁴⁸ This system of education may have appealed to the thrifty Shakers because it was inexpensive and large numbers of students could be taught at one time.⁴⁹

Wells was creative in the teaching methods he used, again demonstrating his understanding of children and how they best learned. He

emphasized use of practical, concrete items in his curriculum. He recommended teaching numbers by using small articles such as kernels of corn or dried beans before using figures. He thought people learned to read better and faster by using pictures with names printed under them. He preferred pictorial primers, but also emphasized a speedy learning of the alphabet and felt most schools were laggard in teaching it. He didn't believe children should be taught words before they knew their meaning.⁵⁰

On the other hand, however, the Lancastrian system was a model of rules and regulation and reflected Wells' personal philosophy that obedience based at least partially on fear and strict regulation was more effective than obedience based solely on love or understanding.⁵¹ The Lancastrian method was symbolized by the statement, "A place for everything and everything in its place," including people. Students were at all times responsible to monitors who worked within a "hierarchy of offices to which every student was bound by threat of physical or mental punishment."⁵² As in a child's Shaker family,

⁴⁸Taylor, "Lancaster," p. 72.

⁴⁹H. Warren Button and Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., *History of Education and Culture in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983), pp. 68-70.

⁵⁰Wells, *School Instruction*, WRHS VII A 14. Quoted in Taylor, *Shaker Education*, p. 172.

⁵¹Wells, *Remarks*, WRHS VII B 66, p. 7.

⁵²Barbara Finklestein, "Casting Networks Of Good Influence: The Reconstruction of Childhood in the United States, 1790-1870," in Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research*

in their Lancaster school room

rules and regulations proscribed every conceivable physical movement of the students as well. In effect, teachers forced students to suspend their impulses; to derive their standards of conduct from the will of the monitors and master. The elaborate and carefully enforced rituals were designed to substitute the mechanical and systematic for the spontaneous and unpredictable. . . . It was an atmosphere designed to stamp out individual differences among individual students, to secure a rigid conformity to rules and regulations as dictated by teachers, to substitute the rule of law for the rule of personal persuasion, to disconnect children from networks of personal communication and engage them, instead, in a highly controlled world of books and print.⁵³

One possible impact of such strict regulation of the sect's children could have been a lack of childlike enthusiasm and spirit and an increase in trying behavior. In *Remarks*, Wells wrote of his concern about a "hardness of heart, a lack of conscience" in the youth and children of the Society. "They appear like eye servants," he wrote, "rather than like those who act from a fixed principle in the soul." The conduct and demeanor of the boys especially worried, and perhaps angered, him: "There seems to be too much of a big, uncultured, hard-hearted, male sense," a "contempt of religious sincerity," and a disregard for "everything called female." These, he believed, were due to a lack of "the softening influence of the Mother," without whom "the soul remains rough and unfit for the growth of any of the Heavenly graces." As both a tribute to his former spiritual mother, and as an indictment of his current spiritual mothers, the best mother, Wells

Guide and Historical Handbook (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 120.

⁵³Finklestein, "Networks," pp. 121-121.

wrote, was Mother Lucy.⁵⁴

Not all in the Society agreed with Wells' or the Lancastrian method of education, even those who taught under his supervision. Franklin Barber, a teacher in the New Lebanon school in 1842-1843, espoused a very different approach and philosophy:

Children should be encouraged to think freely upon what passes before them, to observe the perfections or imperfections, to approve or censure, to admire or despise, & in a respectful manner to express their feelings & thoughts . . . on what they see or hear. Children should be taught the great truths of Religion, & every reasonable effort made to impress their minds with correct ideas on the subject, & proper feelings in respect to it. . . But to attempt to warp the ideas of children into the same channel with our own . . . and restrain by the fear of our displeasure, any new or independent idea that they may have, seems very improper & injurious when properly considered.⁵⁵

Elder Giles Avery echoed some of the same themes in an 1845 essay on the training of children. He may have been seeking a middle ground between Wells' and Barber's advise, one that was perhaps reflective of both Mother's Work and attitudinal changes in the larger culture. In this essay, Avery tries to distinguish between sociability and familiarity, with the former a desirable trait of interaction with children and the latter highly undesirable. "Our first duty," wrote Avery about the sect's obligations to a child is "to teach it wisdom, a knowledge of its duties as they shall present themselves" and "to teach all that is needful & unknown." In order for children to learn that which was being taught, Avery advised caretakers, teachers, and mentors to "always be sociable," meaning

⁵⁴Wells, *Remarks*, WRHS VII B 66, pp. 1, 8-11. Ruth Landon and Asenath Clarke with the females in the Lead Ministry at this time.

⁵⁵Barber, *Reflections*, WRHS VII A 6, p. 1.

"that freedom which suffers us to converse in a free & careful manner on even the smallest things." But to talk to a child simply for the joy of conversing, or to play with a child for the purpose of amusement only, crossed the forbidden line into familiarity.⁵⁶

This writing reflects perhaps a lessening of the emotional distance proscribed for caretakers and teachers in earlier essays, and an attempt to emotionally bond children to the sect.

Seth Wells died in 1847, just two years after Avery's treatise was published.

Given that Avery was part of the Lead Ministry, it is possible to assume that after Wells' death, some of these more temperate views were incorporated by teachers and caretakers. And certainly by 1860, as was illustrated by the new *Rules and Orders*, moderation and flexibility had been restored to the sect.

Age of the Common School

The thirty-five years preceding the Civil War have been labeled as "The Age of the Common School." The focus of educational reform lay in improving the quality of the free public schools on the elementary level where they already existed and extending them to those areas without schools.⁵⁷ Widespread support for district or town schools in this rural area of New York did not exist in the early years of the nineteenth century

⁵⁶*Relative to the Training of Children by Elder Giles B. Avery* (New Lebanon, NY, 1845), WRHS VII B 87, pp. 1-3, 8-12.

⁵⁷Frederick M. Binder, *The Age of the Common School, 1830-1865* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1974), p. 3.

simply because the majority of the population did not perceive education to be an important issue. Formal schooling was not seen in most instances as contributing significantly to the average individual's success.⁵⁸

Numerous private schools, particularly in Albany, competed for students and influenced the meager financial support for public district. Support and control of the local schools was the sole responsibility of the district taxpayers. The status of teachers in the public district schools was low and they often traveled from town to town, boarding with local families, and teaching in each locale for only a few weeks or months each year. Particularly in the rural areas, school may have been held in a private home for only a few weeks in the winter and the children had to walk several miles each way.⁵⁹

Especially during the 1820s and 1830s, children in the rural district schools supplied their own school books and little consistency existed between one student's books and another's. The curriculum depended on what books children could afford, thus often limiting the subjects taught to reading and writing. Learning was by recitation and memorization; arithmetic depended on the ability to read and was largely a memorized system of rules. Schools were not graded and students advanced at their own rate.⁶⁰

Children outside the Shaker community often attended the Shaker school. But the goals of education between the state and the Shakers could not have differed more

⁵⁸Button and Provenzo, *History of Education*, pp. 93-94, 101-102.

⁵⁹Button and Provenzo, *History of Education*, p. 101.

⁶⁰Button and Provenzo, *History of Education*, pp. 80-81.

widely. Seth Wells and other Shaker elders were doing their best in the 1830s to restrict the availability of books and reading materials, especially those published by non-Shakers, so the youth and children, as well as the adults, would not be influenced by the material and carnal values of the world.⁶¹

In contrast, the goal of the national school reformers was to "prepare children to reap the fruits of promised opportunities or to meet the responsibilities of citizenship in a society whose goal was to be no less than a model of enlightened democracy, economic well-being, and Christian morality." Education in the rural New England towns was viewed as crucial for advancement, wealth, and attaining the "American dream."⁶² Education was the great equalizer, the means of achieving economic and social equality. Education in the Shaker communities was a means of control and insuring conformity to

⁶¹Wells, "Remarks on Learning," Andrews Collection, SA 770.

⁶²Binder, *Age of the Common School*, p. 10.

the Society's values.⁶³

Open inspection of the Shaker school by district officials, Wells believed, was an important way to facilitate cordial relations between the state and the Shaker ministry.

Wells took care that Shaker schools met, and often exceeded, the general school laws of the district and state. The New Lebanon Shaker school received its share of state funds and paid annual taxes that supported all the state schools.⁶⁴

The New Lebanon Church Family School: School District #12

Most Shaker families at New Lebanon sent their children to the Church Family school. The District #12 School Record indicates both the number of children attending the school who were not Shakers as well as the Shaker guardian and the number of

⁶³It is interesting to compare education in the Shaker Society with other communal societies of the same period. For example, the Oneida community of Perfectionists seem to have been the society most different from the Shakers. The Oneida society was not celibate; therefore, the Shaker need for gender segregation did not exist, nor did the avoidance of subjects concerning the human body. Nordoff described the Oneida school as "sufficiently good." The Bible was a predominate textbook, but courses in history, grammar, French, Latin, geology, vocal and instrumental music, and the sciences were offered. Advanced training in law and medicine were supported for those with the necessary abilities.

Like the Shakers, the Icarians educated their youth until age sixteen, but "lamented their poverty, which prevented them from providing a better education" for their youth. The Separatists at Zoar kept a year-round school, taught usually in German, until their youth were fifteen. The Amana Society children attended school from ages six to thirteen, in mixed classes with male teachers. The children were instructed in musical notation, but instruments were not allowed. "Only the most elementary instruction, the 'three R's'" was given along with "constant drill in the Bible and in the Catechism." Education in the Amana Society beyond living holy lives, learning God's commandments and submission to God's will was not considered important. Charles Nordoff, *The Communitic Societies of the United States* (New York, NY: Harper and Bros., 1875. New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966, reprint).

In stark contrast were the schools established at New Harmony by Robert Owen and his son, Robert Dale Owen. These schools anticipated many of the educational reforms that were proposed later in the nineteenth century. Emphasis was placed on Pestalozzian principles of instruction that replaced books with visible concrete example whenever possible.

⁶⁴*School Record*, WRHS I B 32.

children residing with him under his care. For example, the records for 1830 indicate that of the sixty-eight children taught, fifty-three residing in the district were "over five and under sixteen years of age," suggesting that fifteen children attending the school were not part of the Shaker community. Twenty-six of the Shaker children resided with Stephen Munson, twenty-one with Daniel Hawkins, and four with William Dagwell. The school was "visited by the Inspectors of Common Schools" three times during the school year, in February, September, and December. The report, dated January 12, 1830, was signed by "clerk" Seth Y. Wells, and Trustees Garrett Lawrence and John Mantle. The portion of school monies that went to support this school was \$24.31.⁶⁵

The supplies purchased for the same year give an indication of how well supplied the Shaker schools were. In December, almost two reams of writing paper were purchased for \$5.80 along with five rules and eleven copies of "Murry's Introduction" for \$1.83. In February, a dozen each of "Elementary Spelling Books," "Smith's Arithmetic," "Colburns," "Webster's Elementary Spelling Books," and "Hall's Lectures on School Keeping." Two hundred slate pencils and india rubber completed this order. In June, three copies of "Webster's School Dictionaries" were added. The purchases of supplies for this school year totaled \$22.67. Tuition amounted to \$16.00 a month for the thirty-five boys, and \$12.00 a month for the twenty-seven girls or \$84.00 for the whole; when the expenses for the supplies were added, the total expenses for the year were \$106.67

⁶⁵*School Record*, WRHS I B 32, pp. 35-36.

which was divided among the First, Second, and Hill Families.⁶⁶

The *Trustees' Day Book* of the Church Family indicates that for the year 1833, Deacon Daniel Hawkins of the Second Family paid \$23.47 for tuition for eighteen boys and \$10.12 for nine girls. Deacon Joseph Allen of another New Lebanon family paid \$10.43 for eight boys and \$4.50 for four girls. In addition, Thomas Estes, Deacon at the East Family, paid for the tuition of two girls by making two chairs for the Church Family.⁶⁷

In 1835, four New Lebanon families were billed for both the preceding and the current years. Deacon Hawkins paid \$29.03 for twenty-five children in 1834 and \$37.60 for thirty children in 1835. The family under Deacon Allen lost all its female students in 1834, but paid \$11.70 for sixteen boys' tuition. The following year, nine of those boys had either reached adulthood or left the family, because tuition was paid for only seven boys. Deacon Bushnell was in charge of the business transactions for his family, paying tuition for six children in 1834 and three children in 1835. The family of Deacon Thrasher had only one girl attending school during these two years, and her schooling cost an average of \$1.18 per year.⁶⁸

In 1839, a new school building was "raised" to either replace or supplement the

⁶⁶*School Record*, WRHS I B 32, pp. 38-39.

⁶⁷*Trustee's Account or Day Book, 1830-1836* (New Lebanon, NY, 1830-1836), 1833. Quoted in Andrews, "Community Industries," pp. 283-284. The New Lebanon community had five families in addition to the Church Family. Deacons from each of these five families paid tuition for each child from their family who attended the Church school.

⁶⁸*Trustee's Account*, 1835. Quoted in Andrews, "Community Industries," pp. 283-284.

first school house.⁶⁹ In 1840, limited instruction in algebra, astronomy, and agricultural chemistry were added to the curriculum.⁷⁰ Calvin Reed began teaching the boys' order in 1843 and remained in this position until 1891, bringing both consistency and care to his relationships with the boys. Reed was assisted during this time by a variety of older boys or Shaker brethren, and helped the teachers in the other New Lebanon families with curriculum, book selection, and teaching methods. Of the Shaker sisters who taught the girls' order, Sarah Bates (1843-1847) and Anna Dodgson (1855-1865) had the longest tenure during this period, but other sisters contributed their teaching gifts as well.⁷¹

While the 1845 *Millennial Laws* may be reflective of only a short period of time in the history of the Shakers, they do give a clear indication of the role and expansion of education in the sect. Section XVI of the 1845 *Laws* stipulated eleven orders concerning the literary education and schooling of the children. The specific subjects that could be taught were spelling, reading, writing, composition, English grammar, arithmetic, "mensuration," the science of agriculture, agricultural chemistry, a "small portion of History and Geography," architecture, moral science, good manners, true religion and singing. In addition, all children were to learn "the History of the Rise and Progress of

⁶⁹*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, September 26, 1839, p. 205. New York State assessor's record dated April 15 of that year lists two school houses in New Lebanon, both two story wood buildings, one 36 by 28 feet, and the other 34 by 24 feet. The larger of the two was built in 1839. Andrews, "Community Industries," pp. 46-47.

⁷⁰[Green and Wells], *Summary View*, p. 65.

⁷¹George J. Lorenz, "Shaker Education," *The Shaker Quarterly* 21, 1 (Spring 1993), p. 20-32.

Believers, and the names of the founders of our society."⁷²

The statutes specifically ruled out the teaching of "Physic, Pharmacy, Anatomy, Surgery, Law, Chemistry . . . Phrenology, Mythology, [and] Mesmerism." These subjects either contradicted Shaker theological beliefs and practices, were deemed "not useful," or focused on the human body. Studying the form and function of the human body could only be viewed as adding fuel to an already present fire for adolescents entering puberty. A definite attitude of "what they do not know, cannot interest them" seemed to prevail. Nor were Shaker children allowed "picture books, with large flourished and extravagant pictures."⁷³ The elders most likely wanted to avoid any unfavorable comparisons between worldly pleasures and possessions and those allowed for Shaker children.

In addition to the previously mentioned subjects, Wells particularly disapproved of geography. In "Remarks on Learning and the Use of Books," he confessed to "serious doubts of the propriety of making it a general study. A general idea of the form and figure of the earth," he continued, "together with some particular knowledge of the country in which we live . . . may be useful . . . especially [to] those called to act in a public capacity."⁷⁴ Beyond that, knowledge of the world was a temptation that might lead to apostasy.

School records for 1845 and 1846 suggest the growth of the school during this

⁷²*Millennial Laws* (1845), WRHS I B 50.

⁷³*Millennial Laws* (1845), WRHS I B 50.

⁷⁴Wells, "Remarks on Learning," Andrews Collection, SA 770.

period. Ninety-two children attended District #12 school which was kept for a total of "8 months & 5 days." By this time, a school library had been established and contained 190 volumes; in 1845, \$18.52 in "Library money" was received and spent. An "Inventory of Articles, Books, & c." was taken in May of the following year, listing the different books used by the various class levels. "Class 1st" used five different "primmers" [sic] for learning to read and "Class 2nd" had seven spelling books. Reading groups of the "Class 3rd" were divided into four groups by ability; the beginning readers used the "Worcester" and "Pierpoint" first level readers, the "2nd Readers" used the "Child's Guide" and "Town's Reader No. 2." The more advanced reading groups used "Intelligent Readers," "Introduction to English Readers," "Worcester's 3rd Book," "English Readers," and "Porter's Rhetorical Reader." Apparently by this time, Wells' stance on geography had changed as three were listed: "Parley's Primary," "Parley's Bible Geography," and "Cummings Geography." Three "grammars" and four "arithmetics" are also listed, as well as "Youth's Manuals" and "fable books."⁷⁵

Wells states in "Remarks" that bookkeeping was seldom taught in common schools but remained a necessary skill to avoid temporal loss and ruin. Moreover, it was "seldom properly attended to by those whom it more immediately concerns." Henceforth, those youth who had the ability to comprehend such matters and "are likely to be useful in it" were to be instructed

in the most proper and correct method of keeping book accounts of the various

⁷⁵*School Record*, WRHS I B 32, 1845-1846.

kinds, and the best method of arranging, filing and preserving Deeds, Notes, Bonds, Receipts, Letters, Orders, and all other useful writings of the kind, that may at any time be committed to their charge; that they may know how such business can be done safely in case they should ever be called to occupy in this branch of business.⁷⁶

This concern with business skills may reflect the growing complexity of the Shaker organization, especially the need to keep track of the varied consecrated goods and the extensive transactions marketing the array of Shaker products to outsiders. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the Shaker Society held the deeds to vast expanses of land throughout the New England states, ran the most prosperous seed business in the country, manufactured furniture and oval boxes for both a national and international market, and cultivated and sold more herbs and medicines than any other purveyor of such "spirits."⁷⁷ Financial success of each family depended completely on the aptitude of the four deacons and deaconesses who transacted all worldly business. It is little wonder that Shaker leaders considered the need for competent business skills important.

Webster's spelling book and dictionary were used in the Shaker schools "as standard works of orthography and pronunciation," having passed Shaker tests of morality and simplicity. The Shakers used the same care in selecting reading books. Generally, Wells preferred the books selected by the Education Society of Boston for use in its public schools. Wells felt that these books excelled "on account of their moral

⁷⁶Wells, "Remarks on Learning," Andrews Collection, SA 770.

⁷⁷Andrews, "Community Industries."

tendency . . . instruction, and for goodness of paper, printing and cheapness." In Wells' view, however, none of these books could compete with the Bible for worthiness of study. "The gospel is our greatest calling," he exclaimed, "our most valuable treasure in this world."⁷⁸

Wells did recommend three specific books as being useful and profitable for the youth: *The Basic Remarker* by Ezera Sampson; *Haws Lectures to Young Men*; and *S. Graham's Lecture to Young Men*. As two of these books specifically focus on the behavior and sexual inclinations of young men, they may be reflective of the sect's growing concern with the loss of so many male youth to the world and were an attempt to counteract this trend.

Perhaps as a testament to the growing literacy of all people, Shaker and non-Shaker alike, several books were approved as suitable for each of the retiring or sleeping rooms. The Bible, a dictionary, spelling book, concordance, and an almanac were acceptable, as were one or more of the Shaker publications, probably Green and Wells' *Summary View of the Millennial Church* or *Youngs' Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*. A stern warning followed Well's short list reminding Shakers that "no one is to have any private claim to any of the aforesaid books."⁷⁹ Even so, initials and occasional names are still found, often in succession, on the title pages or end pages of existing copies of these books.

⁷⁸Wells, "Remarks on Learning," Andrews Collection, SA 770.

⁷⁹Wells, "Remarks on Learning," Andrews Collection, SA 770.

Youth's Behavior

Youths' behavior, especially that of a humble and compliant nature, received as much, if not more, attention by the teachers as their literary education. *A Juvenile Monitor*, written by the New Lebanon school instructors in 1823, sets forth in twenty pages the rules covering all aspects of children's prescribed conduct: behavior toward superiors, equals, inferiors, company and strangers; cleanliness; table manners and other "divers" instructions. Written primarily by Isaac Youngs, Rufus Bishop, and Garrett Lawrence, this book was considered "suitable for the perusal of youth and children" and was meant to give particulars for every possible mode of proper conduct. The concluding paragraph of this work neatly sums up the core of Shaker education and life:

Finally, strive more to please others than to please yourselves, and strive in all your conduct to be agreeable, meek and pleasant. Be careful to regard the principles of honesty, punctuality and justice, in all your conduct; be neat, cleanly and industrious; observe the rules of prudence, temperance and good economy in all your works; subdue all feelings of selfishness and partiality; let the law of love and kindness govern all your feelings; shun all contention and strife, and be careful never to give nor take offense; conduct yourselves with civility, decency and good order before all people; then you will not only enjoy happiness yourselves, but will promote the happiness of all around you.⁸⁰

Twenty-one years later, another edition of the monitor, titled *A Juvenile Guide*, illustrates the growing concern during the mid-1800s with governing and regulating behavior; this, like the 1845 *Laws*, was written during the period of Mother's Work and is

⁸⁰[Isaac Youngs, Rufus Bishop and Garrett Lawrence], *A juvenile monitor: containing instructions for youth and children, pointing out ill manners and showing them how to behave in the various conditions of childhood and youth* (New Lebanon, NY, 1823), Andrews Collection, SA 296, p. 20. Youngs and Lawrence were the first New Lebanon teachers when School District #12 -- the Shaker school -- was established.

reflective of the attempts of the Ministry for heightened control. From the original twenty page *Monitor* pamphlet, the *Guide* had expanded to 131 pages by 1844, covering basically the same topics as the earlier edition but now in minute detail and description. Directed to the youth, this publication also exemplifies the growing need within the Society to maintain strict and subservient "order" and to repel the growing fascination of the youth with the world and the world with the Shakers. The authors addressed this book toward the "two things that generally come the hardest to the youthful mind . . . First, to keep properly back in your place, and not run too fast in your feelings nor actions; and secondly, to believe what is told you from superior experience, and be willing to submit."⁸¹ Such unwavering submission in thoughts, feelings, and actions must have been trying and provoking of resentment for those on the brink of adulthood.

In contrast to the impersonal nature of the *Juvenile Guide*, was the very warm and nurturing tone of *The Gospel Monitor*. Sent by Mother Ann Lee through a spiritual medium during the revival period of "Mother's Work," this 1843 book stressed the innocent nature of children and the continual need for their isolation from, and protection by, adults. Children's innocence was to be protected at all costs, but if the advice in *The Gospel Monitor* were indeed followed, leaving the Children's Order for an adult order would have been a great shock to this nativity and would not have prepared the youth psychologically for membership in a communal society espousing controversial and

⁸¹[Isaac Youngs, Rufus Bishop and Garrett Lawrence], *A Juvenile Guide of Good Manners: Consisting of Counsels, Instructions and Rules of Deportment for the Young, By Lovers of Youth, in two parts* (Canterbury, NH, 1844), Andrews Collection, SA 295, p. 2.

threatening views. Perhaps it was not so much the rigorousness of adult Shaker life that led so many youth to apostatize as it was the absolute contrast between being a child and being an adult in the Society. The attitude of over protectiveness during the 1840s and 1850s may also have led to more than average rebelliousness during the late teenage years and, in fact, induced more to leave than would have had they not been so constricted.

Spiritual Education

The belief that children's commitment to the sect was critical was not translated into an articulated and organized plan of spiritual instruction. Their spiritual education was by association with other members and occasional participation in the religious celebrations, not by concentrated or orderly instruction aimed at producing spiritually committed members or future leaders for the Society. Writings as early as 1815 reflect the concern of influential Shakers that children's spiritual life was not being taken seriously and that this lack would have dire consequences over time. If anything, over the course of the nineteenth century, Shakers seemed afraid to place any substantial emphasis on children's spiritual education because of the Shaker belief in freedom of religious choice and "liberty of conscience." In the Society, freedom of religious choice meant that all children and youth brought into the sect had the right to choose at adulthood whether or not they believed the tenets of the Shaker faith and were either free to join the sect as covenant members or free to leave for the world.

An analysis of four documents written by Wells on children lends support to this assertion. *A plain Statement of custom and manner of receiving, managing, teaching, governing and discipling children, in the Society of people called Shakers* was presumably written by Seth Wells in 1815, five years prior to his appointment by Wright to design and oversee education. In this first document, Wells articulates both his negative perception of children's capacity to understand concepts inherent in Shaker and Christian theology, as well as the "liberty of conscience" doctrine and how it governed even what young children were taught:

It cannot reasonably be supposed [that] young children are capable of understanding the tenets and doctrines of any religious faith, [and] therefore cannot have any conscientious scruples of that kind . . . Liberty of conscience is an established principle of our faith, and no one among us can be restrained from the practice of it. . . . So tenacious is this principle that we have carefully made provision for it in the Indentures.⁸²

In the second but undated document, titled *Government of Children*, Wells reflects on the difference between the physical care of children and on their "moral government & instruction," lending credence to the argument that this aspect of grooming children to be future leaders was neglected:

There is very little danger of Believers being chargeable with a want of kindness in feeding & clothing, or in neglecting the care of the bodies of their children in sickness or health; or of not bringing them up in habits of industry by which they may obtain a livelihood by their hand labor. In general, these things are perhaps sufficiently attended to; but of their moral government & instruction there needs greater care than many among Believers seem to be aware of.⁸³

⁸²[Wells], *Plain Statement*, WRHS VII B 62, pp. 6-7.

⁸³Wells, *Government of Children*, WRHS VII B 53, pp. 1-2.

Apparently, little changed during the next fifteen or so years because Wells stated his fears even more clearly in the third document, *Remarks on the necessity of reforming the morals and improving the religious condition of our youth and children*, written in 1830. Wells began by stating that the "youth & children, who are now growing up among believers, are generally lacking, very lacking, in point of moral goodness and religious information." He then described why morality was considered such a critical component of religiosity:

For youth, we consider morality as the stepping stone to the Gospel; the opening wedge for true religion to enter the soul: or in other words, morality is the preparer of the soil, fitting the soil for the true seed of grace to take root.⁸⁴

To rectify this dearth of "religious information," Wells proposed weekly meetings for children to instruct them in morality as well as using some of the time children spent in adult meetings for the same purpose. "They should be called religious & moral conference meetings," he wrote,

and the labor of all who attend them should be, freely to receive and freely impart religious and moral information. . . . The inseparable connexion [sic] between good morals and true religion, might be here explained, and a daily habit of reflecting upon the moral duties be implanted in the soul.⁸⁵

These personal opinions are difficult to reconcile with Wells' previous assertion of, and strong support for, the doctrine of liberty of conscience. In *Remarks*, he also clearly articulated that fear, or at least some measure of it, should be the basis of

⁸⁴Wells, *Remarks*, WRHS VII B 66, p. 1.

⁸⁵Wells, *Remarks*, WRHS VII B 66, p. 14.

obedience:

Children among Believers do not stand in so much fear of God's retributive justice as many that are brought up in the world. The ready forgiveness they find in confession, tends greatly to take away the fear of hell. Besides, they hear but very little about a great place of fire and brimstone, where the wicked are bound in chains and everlasting darkness, and are tormented by devils, day & night forever and ever; stories that daily thrill in the ears of many other children. . . . But these awful stories had their use: the thoughts of such a blue flame and its attendant horrors, often had the effect to restrain sinful propensities. . . . how can they be made to dread a hell that arises from a guilty conscience, when they know not the horrors of a guilty conscience? and perhaps scarcely ever felt any severe condemnation? . . . Creatures are either drawn to their duty by *love*, or compelled by *fear*; and without either of these incentives, they are left to wander in their own ways, and grope in mazes of their own vain pursuit, of self-willed, ignorance & sin.⁸⁶

Many children brought into the Society when they were young may not have experienced the religious rhetoric Wells wrote of describing the terrors of hell. That he was advocating at least some measure of indoctrination based on such rhetoric is clear and may have been fostered by a growing frustration within the Society because so many youth chose the world instead of the Shakers. Whether Wells was expressing the viewpoint for the majority of the sect's members or a minority viewpoint is unclear as little other data was found espousing either position.

Wells did not easily modify his views, nor his use of guilt as an instrument of obedience, as the fourth document illustrates. In an address to the children and youth sixteen years after *Remarks* and a year before his death, Wells reiterated the expectation the sect had for youth and described what he thought should and would happen to all

⁸⁶Wells, *Remarks*. WRHS VII B 66, p. 7.

youth who proved unfaithful to the gospel. "It will undoubtedly fall to your lot," he wrote, "to support our blessed Mother's gospel and keep the way of God, not only for yourselves, but for many other souls that will be gathered from the lost & wicked world.

. . . If after receiving all these privileges,

you should turn traitors to the way of God, and forfeit these blessed privileges, as some wicked youth and children have done, and be lost at last, it would indeed be an awful and an everlasting loss. You could never recover from such a loss, neither in time nor eternity. Even if after suffering in hell till you had paid the utmost farthing, and found the mercy of God through awful sufferings, and be taken out of hell at last, your loss would be a dark blot & a shameful stain upon your soul forever.⁸⁷

Guilt, it seems, did little in the long run to keep young Shakers "close up" and "in the gift."

Schools in the Declining Years: 1860-1900

During this period, Taylor claims that education "was forced into new roles" as "the pace of American life accelerated, new values were stressed and a greater emphasis was given to technology and the acquisition of possessions" after the Civil War. "A new America was growing up around the isolated Shakers domains, luring away its members, keeping for itself many who might, under other circumstances, have joined the Shaker order."⁸⁸

⁸⁷*Address of Brother Seth Y. Wells to the Youth and Children Throughout the borders of Zion* (New Lebanon, NY, 1846), WRHS VII B 92, pp. 4, 6.

⁸⁸Taylor, *Shaker Education*, p. 230.

Isaac Youngs had foreseen and recorded this modern day assessment in his journal during 1856:

Much depression of spirit has been felt, and struggling thro' dark & gloomy prospects, on account of apostasies, lifelessness & backsliding of unfaithful members, and the scanty ingathering from without. There has been some efforts to open our testimony to the world, for the two last years, & invite in such as were ready to unite in our faith; -- but there is such a stupidity of soul, & absence of conviction for sin in the world, that there is rarely one to be found who is will to submit to the mortifying terms of the gospel.⁸⁹

Other events signaled the changing conditions within the Society. Elisha Blakeman and William Calver, two of the brethren most influential in the boys' order as caretakers and teachers, and who had been raised in the Children's Order, left the Society in 1872. Later in the same year, the New Lebanon community found itself without enough brethren to spare one for a teacher, so sister Emma Jane Neale took over the boys' school.⁹⁰ As a way to keep the school children involved and occupied, the school term was lengthened to 150 days and ran from June to September, music was introduced into the school curriculum, and freehand drawing, gymnastics, and more composition were added.⁹¹

The Shakers gradually adopted the philosophy that if they were going to lose so many of their youth to the world, at least they would be prepared to make their own way. Boys continued to be taught a variety of useful and practical skills. And, in regards to the

⁸⁹Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, pp. 176-177.

⁹⁰Crosman, *Record Book*, WRHS V B 143, March 14-April 18, November 21, 1872.

⁹¹Taylor, *Shaker Education*, p. 241, 264.

girls who married, the Shakers claimed "satisfaction in thinking they have been taught diligence, economy, and all branches of domestic knowledge," the "best possible training for wives and mothers."⁹²

During the last years of the century, education became mandatory. This created truancy problems in the sect, especially among the male youth, with the farms claiming their interest more than their books. The children of the hired families who now worked the farms and assisted in the trades went to school with the Shaker children, bringing with them their worldly ideas, dreams, and habits. When sister Grace Brown died in 1905, having taught in the New Lebanon schools for twenty-eight years, no other Shaker was qualified to teach and a teacher from the world was hired to take her place.⁹³

Conclusion

Even though Wells seems acutely aware that the fate of Shakerism was in the hands of these youth and children, his emphasis on "strict obedience and true submission to their Elders and caretakers" may have, in fact, precluded the spiritual development that fostered conversion.⁹⁴ Continued prosperity of the Shaker Society depended as much on spiritual unity as on practical unity of the Believers. Brewer suggests that the Believers failed to create a "spiritual atmosphere for the youngsters in their charge that successfully

⁹²Taylor, *Shaker Education*, p. 254.

⁹³Taylor, *Shaker Education*, pp. 268-269.

⁹⁴Letter of Ministry Enfield to Ministry New Lebanon, Feb. 16, 1833, WRHS IV A 12.

brought a majority of them to conversion as adults." The practical and logistical manner of dealing with the children, she contends, foreshadowed the drastic rates of apostasy upon the coming of age of these children during the ensuing years of the nineteenth century.⁹⁵

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Shaker education was used as one method of reducing individuality and enhancing homogeneity of members. From the first attempts in 1808 by Mother Lucy to Youngs' educational restrictions mid-century, the primary emphasis of education rested on usefulness and practicality. But as more and more youth failed to convert at adulthood, the educational training and achievements of the Shaker youth also proved to be a reason for their apostasy. Because most Shaker youth acquired skills during their apprenticeships that would provide for their economic subsistence in the world as well as in the Society, children were more apt to leave the Society and pursue an independent life. It is little wonder that Shaker leaders often felt discouraged and placed little faith in the children they had invested so much in, only to have the youth use the skills taught them in the Society to return to the world.

⁹⁵Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 75.

CHAPTER SIX. CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the material presented in the previous five chapters in terms of the research questions outlined in Chapter One and draw conclusions about why children left the Society. The broad research questions were: why did children and youth leave the Society in the nineteenth century and did the Society's socialization process contribute to their leaving? To answer these two questions, four specific objectives were formulated: What beliefs and practices contributed to creating the Children's Order? Did the expectations for, and the role of, children change from 1774 to 1900? Did the socialization process and caretaker/mentor system influence allegiance to, and the numerical decline of, the Society? And lastly, how did childhood in a Shaker family compare to non-communal New England childhood and family life during the same period?

Beliefs and Practices Contributing to the Creation of the Children's Order

The New Lebanon Children's Order was created in 1792 by Joseph Meacham for the same practical and theological reasons he used to organize or "order" the rest of the sect.¹ Meacham grouped people together on the basis two criteria: their religious

¹There is no data to suggest that Ann Lee thought children should be segregated from their parents. The Children's Order was created as a subunit of the Second Family because this is where most of the children were already living.

commitment to the two primary theological beliefs (the millennium was here, now; Ann Lee was the second coming of Christ), and their independence from worldly ties (primarily debt, marriage, and children). All of the orders were based on like-mindedness -- similarities and differences in these two areas -- and served to build group cohesiveness. For example, the Shakers in the first or inner order (the Church) were those who were fully committed to the two theological/spiritual tenets *and* who were unmarried and free from children and debt. Shakers who either were not as spiritually convinced *or* who were not yet completely free of their financial or family commitments made up the second or outer order (Second Family). One reason children and youth were grouped together was because they were similar in age, dependent status, and spiritual development.

A second reason to separate children from adults could have been due to limited dwelling space because of the rapid influx of youth under age sixteen into the sect from 1787 to 1792.² This practical consideration presumably played as much a part in Meacham's decision to separate the children from their natural parents as did any religious concerns. A need for social control is proposed as a third reason for separating youth and adults.³ Locating children and youth in separate buildings was one way of providing closer supervision and regulating their behavior that was not possible if

²Approximately one-quarter of the new converts were children younger than sixteen. Brewer's data indicate that in 1790, before the creation of the first Youth's Order, 54 children ages 7-16 lived in the Second Family and that a total of 65 children had joined the Society within the years 1787 - 1791. "Demographic Features," p. 36; *Shaker Communities*, p. 213.

³Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, p. 67.

children were living with their natural parents.

It is proposed, first, that Meacham understood that bringing children in and raising them in the sect was one of the primary ways to ensure the future of this celibate society. In his writings, he states that his goal for these children was that they become "leaders and ministers of the gospel."⁴ Secondly, creating a separate order for children and youth may illustrate the various components of commitment as outlined by Kanter: retention of members, group cohesiveness, and social control. Two early changes affecting the Children's Order lend support to these proposals, one regarding supervision of the youth and the second regarding physical relocation of the Youths' Order. Both of these changes can be seen as efforts to build cohesiveness and to exert control.

The first change was Meacham's 1775 decision to transfer the supervision of the Youth's Order from the Second Family (where their natural parents lived) to the Church or Senior Order (where the Lead Ministry and other leaders lived). Transferring supervision to the most devout order of Shakers suggests that Meacham was highly cognizant of the sect's dependence on these children and needed to take measures to assure their allegiance, and that he was skeptical of the ability of the "younger" or more worldly entangled Believers outside the inner court to supply the needed constancy and faithfulness to keep youth in the sect.

The second change was Wright's 1806 decision to physically relocate the youth to

⁴Green, *Clough*, WRHS VI B 24, p. 44.

the Church/Senior Order.⁵ Transferring all children to the Church in 1806 was very significant in that it marked the first time in Shaker history that kin ties were explicitly broken. Under Mother Ann, physical celibacy was enforced for adults living in the Shaker community, but natural family members continued to live in the same dwelling or on the same farm; emotional ties between parents and children continued virtually unbroken. In fact, Meacham's early instructions for children "residing among believers" was that they should continue to "call their parents father & mother."⁶ Moving the Children's Order to the Church specifically broke the ties between parents and children and called into question the interpretation of what human connections and emotional attachments were considered appropriate. While marital relationships had been viewed as interfering with one's total devotion to God, Ann Lee did not include relationships to one's children in this idea. Specifically separating children from their parents by physically distancing them to a separate part of the community meant that all biological relationships, not just marital ones, were negated. This study suggests that primary purpose of establishing the Children's Order in the exacting Church Order was to emotionally isolate both the adults and the children from one another, and to extend the scope of Lee's concept of celibacy. What Lee instituted was sexual celibacy; from 1787 to 1806, Meacham and Wright expanded this to encompass emotional celibacy -- the

⁵Green, *Clough*, WRHS VII B 24, pp. 47-48; *Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, November 27 & December 1, 1806, p. 46.

⁶Johnson, "Biographical Account," p. 65.

absence of emotional attachment between parents and children as well. It is possible to speculate that Meacham and Wright thought this would enhance the likelihood of children staying in the community; in actuality, however, it seems to have had the opposite effect because it interfered with the youths' ability to become part of a cohesive group and to develop the "we-feeling" necessary for commitment to occur.⁷

Perceptions of the Role of Shaker Children 1774-1900

First Generation Leaders 1774-1787

The growth of the Children's Order in the first decades of the nineteenth century was a direct result of an inflow of adults who brought children with them. Shakers depended solely on converts from the outside society for their growth; turning away converts with children would have been highly counter-productive to the whole issue of continuance and progress and against the Shakers' belief in charity.

There is little reason to doubt that Ann Lee loved and highly valued children, regardless of her evangelical concept of their soul and state of being on this earth. Throughout the personal accounts in *Testimonies*, one gets images of Ann advising mothers to gently love and nurture their offspring as true gifts of God, to keep them neat and clean, well-fed and governed.⁸ She believed that children were innocent in their nature and such innocence ought to be guarded and preserved. Hannah Cogswell

⁷Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, pp. 72-73.

⁸*Testimonies*, pp. 275-279

recorded that Mother Ann spoke of little children as being "nearer to the Kingdom of heaven than those grown to a riper age. . . . Little children are simple and innocent; they should be brought up so; and they never ought to be brought out of it. For if they were brought up in simplicity, they would receive good as easy as they would evil."⁹

Although little is recorded of the words of Father William, his sentiments on children apparently ran parallel to Ann's. Shakeress Anna Northup's testimony included William's declaration that "Blessed are the children of those who believe the gospel."¹⁰ Unfortunately, what was apparently not recorded in the original documents were Ann's, William's, or James Whittaker's beliefs about the role children did play or would play in the future of the sect beyond their beliefs that children were a gift of God nor how the leaders' plans to retain the youth as adult members. Ann's mission lay in establishing the spiritual basis (order) of the sect, not the organizational or temporal order needed to accomplish the work of the community. Thus, during this period the role of children in the Society is unclear.

The Second Generation Leaders 1787-1821

Father Joseph seems to have been the first Shaker leader to publicly recognize and acknowledge the important role children coming to the sect played in the perpetuation of the Society and to take steps to secure their future as Shakers. Up until this time, the

⁹Testimony of Hannah Cogswell, *Testimonies*, pp. 275-276.

¹⁰Testimony of Anna Northup, *Testimonies*, p. 276.

emphasis seems to have been on gathering adult Believers; children, like household items and livestock, simply came with them. Meacham's belief that children and youth needed to be in an order unto themselves suggests he, and perhaps others, recognized this age group's individual and collective significance.

Like other aspects of Shaker order, if Meacham had lived longer and remained the principal leader, the form and substance of the Youth's Order may have evolved differently. However, it is suggested that Meacham thought creating a separate order for youth and children was one way to increase the rewards of living in the Society for both adults and children and concurrently diminish the costs of membership. Adult converts came to the sect for a variety of spiritual, economic, and emotional reasons. Perhaps some came because they simply did not value marriage or like children. Keeping children apart from those adults who would not be positive influences on them or treat them with consideration could have been one way of binding both children and adults to the sect.

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the belief that children were essential primarily as future leaders assumed prominence over the belief that children were essential primarily as gifts of God. Wright's removal of the Youth's Order to the Church, and her primary emphasis on the school education of the youth can be seen to reinforce and further establish the expectation that the youth would become the Society's leaders.¹¹

¹¹Carr, "Lucy Wright," p. 130.

The Third Generation Leaders 1821-1900

The age of Shaker history from 1820 to about mid-century often is referred to as "the golden age." The name is reflective of the acceptance the sect had found within the larger society and the routinization and security of life for many Believers. With toleration and security, however, came the beginnings of decline. To the leadership installed after Wright (Ebenezer Bishop, Rufus Bishop, Ruth Landon, and Asenath Clarke)¹² fell the "uninspiring duty of preserving something handed down."¹³

The role of the children during this eighty year period changed considerably. From 1821 to mid-century, the Society educated and cared for youth with the expectation they would remain in the sect and assume the leadership. However, as the rate of youth apostasies and removals continued to escalate during the century, these hopes were shattered. By the end of the Civil War, few adult Shakers, including the leaders, put any reliance on the youth to remain in the sect as they reached adulthood. One significant factor proposed to have contributed to the rapid loss of youth was the increasing emphasis on strict regulations from 1821 to about 1855 as demonstrated by the evolution of the *Millennial Laws*.

As noted in Chapter Five, the *Millennial Laws* as first published in 1821 primarily reflected Meacham's organization ideas; rules governing day to day life were only those essential for the social control of the sect *as it then was*. However, membership in the

¹²*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, February 10, 1821, p. 91.

¹³Sidney Lucas, *The Quaker Story* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949), pp. 96-99.

Society grew rapidly in the 1820s and 1830s. Many of these members had not known the first generation of English and American. Many were "lukewarm" in their spiritual commitment to the sect.¹⁴ For them, the Shakers' "early vision" wasn't "a glowing reality but a dim memorial"; the Society was perhaps more "a monument rather than a movement."¹⁵ This rapid increase in membership combined with only instrumental commitment (rewards and costs of membership) to the sect, without the moral (spiritual) or affective (emotional) commitments that Kanter suggests are necessary for retention of members and group cohesion, may have increased the needs for much stricter control, group cohesiveness, and a spiritual grounding.

The internal revival period of Mother Ann's Work that began in the late 1830s can be interpreted as one attempt by the common members of the sect to reestablish the spiritual foundation and the vitality of the early Society.¹⁶ However, as it continued into the mid-1840s, the leadership presumed that strict practical or temporal order indicated heightened spiritual order. The reissuance of the *Millennial Laws* in 1845 incorporated for adults and children alike all the extensive "instructions" and prohibitions received during Mother's Work and reflected this era at its height, both in terms of the individual spiritual gifts that informed the *Laws* and the strict temporal control that they attempted

¹⁴White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, p. 136; Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, p. 49.

¹⁵Lucas, *Quaker Story*, pp. 96-99.

¹⁶Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, pp. 112-113, 134-135.

to achieve.¹⁷

Some members regarded these additional restrictions and regulations as trivial and ridiculous. Elder Freegift Wells disagreed with the Ministry's attempt to enforce gospel order with meticulous restrictions. He believed it was "impossible to drive souls to Heaven . . . whatever attempts are made in this line will cause more to jump into hell than it will help along the road to Heaven."¹⁸ Negativism and internal dissention, especially among the youth of the Society, escalated sharply. An atmosphere of rebellion, unbelief, and "loss of confidence in the Lead" seemed to prevail.¹⁹ By 1848, even the very faithful and devoted Isaac Youngs was writing that "considerable voluntary effort has been necessary to keep up a life of devotion."²⁰

The long term result of this revival era was not a restoration of prosperity and growth but a noticeable decline in the vigor of the members and in the number of youth and young adults. Youngs recorded his, and perhaps others', sense of depression and hopelessness at the close of 1856, particularly around the dwindling hopes and expectations for the children they invested with their future: "We gather in many children, but when they come to act for themselves, a large portion of them choose the

¹⁷Johnson, "Rules and Orders," pp. 140-141.

¹⁸Wells, "Series of Remarks," WRHS VII B 266, p. 40.

¹⁹Freegift Wells, *Notebook #4* (Watervliet, NY, 1855), WRHS VII B 270, pp. 14-15; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 138. Wells' *Notebooks #5 and #6*, especially pp. 67-68, 77-78, and 84 in the latter, reiterate the same themes, often using the same words.

²⁰Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, p. 161.

flowery path of nature, rather than the cross."²¹

From this it can be concluded that the emphasis on strictly regulated behavior increased the number of youth who left the sect because it undermined the youths' instrumental commitment leading to a lack of group cohesiveness and an unacceptable level of social control. As the number of rules increased, the costs of staying with the sect increased and outweighed the diminishing rewards.²²

The data collected by Brewer indicate that the more rapid loss of young members that began in the 1840s continued to escalate during the last half of the nineteenth century.²³ Less than one-third of the thirty-nine female children brought into the New Lebanon Children's Order from 1841 to 1850 lived out their adult lives as Shakers. For the same period, only five of the forty-seven male Church Family youngsters remained with the Society.²⁴

By the time a new Lead Ministry published a completely revised and far less strict *Rules and Orders* in 1860, the loss of youth was irreversible and continued to escalate: forty-one of the forty-six females and fifty-four of the fifty-eight males brought into the Children's Order in the 1850s either apostatized, were reclaimed by parents or guardians, or died before reaching adulthood. Of the eighty-seven children added to the New

²¹Youngs, *Concise View*, Andrews Collection, SA 760, pp. 176-177.

²²Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, pp. 67-68.

²³Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, pp. 210, 212-214.

²⁴Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 179.

Lebanon Children's Order during the decade of 1861-1870, only one child became a covenant member at age twenty-one; fifty-two of these youth were removed by parents, one died, and the remaining thirty-two were apostates. Of the one hundred and ten children admitted between 1871 and 1900, not one child converted upon reaching adulthood.

The loss of most of the children and youth from the sect during this century is indicative of the inability of the Society to effectively balance the costs of communal membership against the rewards of the world in such a way as to retain the younger members of the sect. Both male and female youth acquired marketable skills and formal schooling in the sect that provided for worldly economic independence; this one advantage may have enticed many Shaker youth to go to the world. The next section will examine the affective dimension of commitment through a look at the relationships between children, youth, and adults within the sect, and assess the Shakers' success in this domain.

Affective Commitment and Emotional Attachment

Mothers Ann and Lucy seem to have had an emotional attachment to and concern for children that later Shaker leaders did not. Ann instructed parents on how to treat their children and on the model they should present:

Do not examine your small children very closely in respect to wickedness: for if you do, they will want to act in it, to get knowledge of it. . . . You ought never to call children bad names, as the people of the world do; but call them by their

proper names, and set a godly example before them, as becomes the gospel. And you must keep them to work; not allow them to be idle; for if you do, they will grow up just like the world's children. . . . Let your conversation, before your children, be that which becomes godliness. Do not talk about that which will excite their minds to evil . . . ²⁵

Even though Lee's words and instructions about children guided later leaders, the interpretation of these advisements seemed to be void of most emotion after Mother Lucy's tenure, perhaps because of the growing emphasis on strictly regulated behavior and the spiritual excesses of Mother Ann's Work. It is proposed that the caretakers appointed by the leadership installed after Wright attended to the physical education and environment of Shaker children but failed to establish the necessary emotional attachment with and to the children, thus children and youth left the Society because they may not have had an affective commitment to the sect.²⁶

From 1790 until the 1840s, interactions between Shaker adults and children focused on formal schooling and learning trades and other skills; as expected, little mention was made of children's emotional needs in journals and diaries until the 1840s. Relationships were instrumental and functional. Seemingly, such relationships also came with a cost. The increasing apostasy rate of youth that began in the 1830s may be one indication of their lack of emotional commitment or attachment to both Shaker brothers and sisters and to the sect itself.

²⁵Testimonies of Phebe Spencer and Lydia Mathewson, *Testimonies*, p. 277.

²⁶Giles B. Avery, *Relative to the Training of Children* (New Lebanon, NY, 1845), WRHS VII B 87, p. 2; Barber, *Reflections*, WRHS VII A 6, pp. 4-5; Wells, *Government of Children*, WRHS VII B 53, pp. 1-2

As the focus on control and order intensified during the 1840s and 1850s, children became even more segregated from the adults; children's contact with adult Shakers, the embodiment of Shakerism itself, became extremely limited. One or two adult caretakers and teachers, usually young in age as well as in spirit, were the exclusive source of what it meant to be a Shaker. For example, in 1837 all children younger than seven were no longer sharing even mealtimes with the older children or with the adults in the Church Family.²⁷ The normal transmission of values from adults to children via daily contact and participation in shared family activities was not emulated in Shaker families. Children had few role models to influence them, few opportunities to enjoy personal relationships, and little opportunity to join in adult activities that focused on spiritual understanding or that fostered commitment.

By the 1840s, the Society seems to have recognized the importance of children's emotional lives, at least on a limited basis. One indicator of how much attitudes toward children within the sect had changed from 1790 was the publication of *The Gospel Monitor* in 1843. The basic thrust of the message in this pamphlet was reform of the prevailing attitudes toward children from their caretakers: the emotional distance placed between the children and their caretakers was detrimental to the future of the Society and to the children themselves. Caretakers were cautioned "that the young of the flock need the first watch and the tenderest care." "Be patient, be wise, be charitable," the advice

²⁷*Domestic Journal*, WRHS V B 60, April 26, 1837, p. 197.

continued; "be parents of true love."²⁸

In contrast to the advice given to caretakers, however, was the advice given to the rest of the sect. Instead of lessening the segregation between adults and children, expanding the segregation was sanctioned and encouraged in *The Gospel Monitor*. Emotional and physical affinity were advocated for caretakers and teachers only, and did not apply to the rank and file of Shaker adults. Children and the vast majority of adult Shakers were strictly segregated, partially to protect the innocence of children, but perhaps also to guard against the formation of what was perceived to be inappropriate emotional attachments between children and adults.

Numerous apostasies among the Church Family adults not only drastically reduced the potential pool of leaders during the latter half of the century, but it also fostered diminishing leadership quality in the members that remained. Appropriate role models for the thinning ranks of children were few and far between; caretakers and teachers, like many Shakers, were waning in their devotion to Shaker beliefs, going through the motions of service without personal commitment.²⁹

These caretakers and teachers were not able to form, for personal as well as societal reasons, the needed emotional commitments with their young charges to induce a significant number of children to remain Shakers in adulthood. Combining this lack of

²⁸*The Gospel Monitor*, p. 13.

²⁹ Wells, *Notebook #6*, WRHS VII B 270a, pp. 65-70, 76-77; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 184; Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, p. 87.

affective commitment by youth with inadequate instrumental commitment as perceived by the youth increased the likelihood that youth would leave the sect.

Moral Commitment and Spiritual Instruction

By the 1830s, few Shakers, young and old alike, were able to testify to the "primacy of experience" -- the personal and "immediate experience of the presence of Christ"-- that was fundamental in Shaker theology and was the foundation of the early Shaker church. As Elder John Lyon stated in 1831, "Without experience, there can be no knowledge either of things spiritual or temporal."³⁰ As already discussed in Chapter One, moral compellingness is one important dimension of commitment. But as was shown in Chapter Five, the sect seemed to neglect to spiritual education of youth and place undo emphasis on freedom of religious choice. Thus, it might be speculated that without the children and youth having this personal experience, they could not make a lasting personal commitment to the Society because they could not endorse or support the religious beliefs of the system. As one contemporary Shaker historian pointed out, "problems of indoctrination were greater when children left their order. . . . Adolescence was a period when the youth often grew resentful of authority and impatient under the many orders restricting freedom." The more intelligent youth often experienced a

³⁰John Morgan, "Experience as Knowledge: A Study in Shaker Theology," *The Shaker Quarterly* 14, 2 (Summer 1974), pp. 43-44.

conflict between "faith and reason," with reason often winning.³¹ Thus, in all three domains of commitment -- instrumental, affective, and moral -- the Shakers failed to meet the needs of the children and youth in such a way as to keep them "up close" and "in the gift."³² The result was the loss of most youth from the Society by the end of the nineteenth century which in turn contributed to the decline of the sect.

Childhood and Family in the Larger Society 1790-1900

Childhood in the New Lebanon community was not very different from that of other children in New England in the nineteenth century. Barbara Finklestein's essay on the reconstruction of childhood describes the "contours of childhood" in this larger New England society between 1790 and 1870:

Formal education might have proceeded within families, churches, or within schools, if it occurred at all. . . . they participated fully in the life of the community, attending church services, working the farms, tending households along with their parents, and acquiring the rudiments of literacy in between all of this other activity. Immersed in the traditional language, culture, myths, mores, and manners of their parents, children received the whole of their education in the presence of parent-approved mentors, within households, churches, and communities, in the fields, on the streets, or in the workplace.³³

At the opening of the nineteenth century, the primary influence in most children's lives, whether they lived with their natural parents or with their caretakers in the Shaker

³¹ Andrews, *Shakers*, p. 191.

³² Elkins, *Fifteen Years*, p. 30.

³³ Finkelstein, "Networks," pp. 115-116.

community. were their families; they lived in rural areas, working on farms or small shops, "aware of and responsible for their importance contributions to family well-being." Toys, if children had them at all, were hand-made, books were rare, schooling sporadic, and childhood short. By the 1820s, perceptions in New England society were changing about original sin and predestination. Changes by "mainstream American Protestants" reflected the new view that children were born innocent, a "blank slate," and were not the harbingers of their parents' or society's sins.³⁴

Similarly, Ann Lee's view of children reflected a mixture of the Calvinist doctrine of original sin, Rousseau's "innocent child," and Locke's blank slate, a mix of views not unusual for the times. "Children will be sanctified," said Ann, "through the believing husband." "You should examine your children and bring them to confession. . ." And, conversely, "little children are simple and innocent." A strong Calvinist influence can be seen in Lee's view of toys for children, however, which was harsher than the view of the larger society: "You must bring up your children in the fear of God; and never give them play things; but let them look at their hands and fingers, and see the work of God in their creation." On another occasion, she reproved old and young alike for "allowing, and the children for having and playing with toys and play things." "When I was a child," she

³⁴Mary Lynn Stevens Heininger, "Children, Childhood, and Change in America, 1820-1920," in Mary Lynn Stevens Heininger, Karin Calvert, Barbara Finkelstein, Kathy Vandell, Anne Scott MacLeod, and Harvey Green, *A Century of Childhood 1820-1920* (Rochester, NY: The Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1984), pp. 1-2.

reportedly said, "my mind was taken up in the things of God."³⁵

The revivals that swept the northeastern states in the 1830s once again urged preparation for the millennium through perfectionism.³⁶ This time, however, "the road to a perfect world had to be paved with perfect children," not just perfect adults.³⁷

Behavior of the young was no longer seen as an immutable manifestation of the man or woman to come. Rather, childhood was the time during which influential adults could fashion an appropriate mold whose impressions would shaped future conduct. And if children's souls were not simply fonts of evil, but, offered potential for virtue, then training -- instilling that virtue and nurturing it to fruition -- should become a primary responsibility of American adults.³⁸

New converts coming into the Society during the middle decades of the nineteenth century probably brought these ideas of shaping youths' minds and conduct through "training" with them. The philosophy of Shaker teacher Franklin Barber discussed in Chapter five illustrates some influence of Rousseau's innocent child and John Locke's blank slate.³⁹ For example, in his 1843 treatise on education, Barber advocated that children "be encouraged to think freely" and that "every reasonable effort [be] made to impress their minds with correct ideas."⁴⁰

Rousseau's philosophy of the innocent child was pervasive in the larger culture by

³⁵*Testimonies*, pp. 12, 44-45, 245, 275-279, 293, 313, 323; Heininger, "Children," p. 2; Youcha, *Minding the Children*, p. 68.

³⁶Heininger, "Children," p. 2-3.

³⁷Youcha, *Minding the Children*, p. 68.

³⁸Heininger, "Children," p. 3.

³⁹Heininger, "Children," p. 2.

⁴⁰Barber, *Reflections*, WRHS VII A 6, p. 1.

the mid-nineteenth century. Children began to be valued "simply for what they were" or for what adults "perceived them to be." Good New England Christians now embraced a "love of childhood" and tender appreciation for the simplicity of childish thinking. God became a "metaphor of parental love and authority," losing the "heavy-handed" fearsomeness of a previous generation.⁴¹

This new conception of the young -- cherishing their lack of development and celebrating their resemblance to sweet blossoms and romping kittens -- led to a growing popular acceptance of childhood innocence by the final third of the century. . . . To all appearances the status of children had been greatly elevated. . . . The basis of the new attitudes and their literacy, social, and material manifestations was the conviction that the young differed radically from the old, in body, soul, perception, and personality.⁴²

By 1900, much in the lives of worldly children had changed. The majority of middle-class children lived in towns and cities; childhood had become a viable and longer part of life and was filled with mass-produced toys, books, and clothing catering to this new market; school was mandatory; and regulations and prohibitions about child labor were common. Heininger points out that while the family influence remained strong, "middle-class American's attitudes and behavior toward the young were being shaped more and more by 'experts' -- educators, psychologists, journalists, and advertisers."⁴³

These changes were not "initiated" by children, but "occurred as a result of major shifts in almost every aspect of adults' lives -- religious thought and intellectual

⁴¹Heininger, "Children," pp. 10-11.

⁴²Heininger, "Children," pp. 15, 18.

⁴³Heininger, "Children," p. 1.

movements, as well as economic, political, and social conditions." Collectively, these "forces altered profoundly the ways in which middle-class Americans regarded, instructed, and behaved toward their children."⁴⁴

In comparison, the lives of Shaker children from the middle of the nineteenth century to the end seemed stagnant and certainly did not reflect the philosophical shifts taking place elsewhere in New England. While their schools were still some of the best in the rural areas, apprenticeships were still the primary method of learning skills, children's daily labor was critical for the sects' economy, they were still housed and reared segregated from most adult Shakers, worldly expert opinions rarely permeated the boundaries of this tightly knit system, and as a group their status was quickly diminishing rather than escalating.

The emergence of the modern American family roughly between the years of the American Revolution and 1830 is what, perhaps, delineates the Shaker Society most from the larger culture.⁴⁵ At its inception and during its early decades, the Shaker families conformed primarily, in terms of functions, to those of rural families in New England. Hareven has pointed out several characteristics of families that are common to both the cultures under discussion. First, preindustrial households often included unrelated individuals such as apprentices and community "unfortunates" such as orphans, elderly, and delinquents or run-aways. Secondly, the household served as both

⁴⁴Heininger, "Children," p. 1.

⁴⁵Degler, "Modern American Family," p. 65.

the family's place of residence and the focus for the family's various domestic activities such as eating, sleeping, and child rearing . . . [and] the site of production, as a welfare agency and correctional institution, as an educational institution, and as a place of religious worship. . . . the household served the entire community, by taking in dependent members who were not related to the family and by helping maintain the social order.⁴⁶

Shaker families, thus, had much in common with other families of the time and, at least conceptually if not in appearance, were simply an extension of the numbers of people that lived in a household. However, as American families continued to evolve in the nineteenth century into spheres of private life, the differences between Shaker families and New England families became not only more noticeable, but their essential reasons for existence diverged. Aries states that the focus of the modern family as a private entity was to expend "all the energy of the group . . . on helping children to rise in the world, individually and without any collective ambition."⁴⁷ This function of the family was almost the direct opposite of the function of the Shaker family where the individual was subsumed into the collective. Looking at Kanter's three aspects of commitment -- retention, group cohesiveness, and social control -- may explain these differences. According to Aries, the family's role was to launch, not retain, its children by elevating the needs of selective members over the needs of other members and, presumably, by lessening the family's cohesiveness. For the Shaker family to succeed, the needs of the collective had to be elevated over the needs of individuals and group

⁴⁶Hareven, "Home and Family," p. 255.

⁴⁷Aries, *Centuries*, p. 404.

cohesiveness had to be conscientiously maintained.

Conclusion

The New Lebanon Children's Order served, as did the whole community, as a model for the other Northeastern Shaker communities. Perhaps a heightened sense of needing to be perfect existed here because of this function; perhaps a fear of being found wanting fueled a desire for an exact and literal adherence to all Shaker laws. Or maybe the degree to which these devout Believers judged themselves to fall short of perfection and sinlessness contributed to a rigidity that was not found in other communities.

Whatever complexity of internalized expectations and beliefs operated within the Church, family members most likely contributed to the atmosphere within the Children's Order that failed to win so few to conversion by not fostering the needed spiritual and affective relationships that contribute to group cohesion and the retention of members.

Adults attracted to the Society seemed to be trying more to escape relationship ties and dependencies with both adults and children than to invest in warm, personal warm relationships. Relationships were impartial and impersonal, respectful but not nurturing, practical but not spiritual. Throughout the history of American Shakerism, the separation of children into their own order seemed aimed more toward the successful socialization of adults than socialization of the children. Children were fed, housed, and educated but they were not necessarily considered a vital link in the Society. By splitting apart worldly families, however gradually that process was accomplished, the elders and

eldresses could overcome the whole issue of family and personal affections and more effectively maintain control over the membership, but they could not remove the need for individual achievement and intimate relationships. The very process that separated children from the adult Society seemed to separate children from the Shaker future. This study suggests that the combination of rigorous standards for behavior, the lack of emotional attachments between children and adults, and the lack of religious experience of the youth increased the rate of loss and contributed to the decline of the Society.

During the remainder of the century, few children were brought to the New Lebanon Society, and even fewer accepted. The adult population of the New Lebanon Church Family shrunk to thirty-eight members by the turn of the century.⁴⁸ Thoughts of renewed gathering and expansion were relinquished; Shakers turned instead to preserving the essence of their religion and way of life instead of their numbers. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Society had closed its doors to the vast majority of converts. Faith in the human perpetuation of Shakerism was slowly reconciled to an acceptance of an unknown divine will and an unknown future.

The failure of the New Lebanon community to keep children in the faith was only one factor in the numerical demise of the Shaker Society. Other changes during the last half of the nineteenth century, both economic and social, within the Society and in the outside world, contributed to the decline of the Shakers. For all their diminishing

⁴⁸Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 210. New Lebanon was closed in 1947 and the few Shakers remaining were transferred to other communities. The only remaining active community is Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

numbers, a few devout Shakers remain alive today. If one judges a society successful by longevity alone, the Shakers could certainly be deemed successful in comparison to other perfectionist communal societies. Perhaps, given the beliefs on which the Society was founded and the complexity of human nature, they have survived far longer than realistically could be expected.

In some ways this research revises earlier studies that suggested a more positive emotional environment existed in the Children's Order during the nineteenth century. Perhaps this seeming contradiction is due to twentieth century personal Shaker testimonies being generalized to earlier time periods. But the Shaker Society of the present century is in many ways far more open and progressive than the earlier Society; many of the restrictions that were imposed during the mid-nineteenth century had been eliminated by the early 1900s and a more broad-minded philosophy had replaced the previous narrower and literal attitude. Nor can it be suggested that at any point in Shaker history that children were neglected physically. It is only when the complex issue of the value of emotionally intimate relationships and family affectional ties are added that a different picture of the New Lebanon Children's Order during the nineteenth century is proposed.

APPENDIX

Introduction to Secondary Literature Sources

Both primary and secondary sources are pertinent to this study of the New Lebanon Children's Order. Locating and selecting primary sources was discussed in the methods section of Chapter One; secondary sources will be reviewed here.

Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews were the pioneers in researching and writing about the Shakers, especially those communities located in New England and New York. Their many volumes about this unique utopian sect began in 1933 with *The Community Industries of the Shakers*; this was followed in 1937 by *Shaker Furniture* and *Gift to be Simple: Songs, Dances and Rituals of the American Shakers* in 1940. They brought Shakerism into the public limelight with the publication of the first comprehensive history of the society, *The People Called Shakers*, in 1953. Following this they published, *Religion in Wood* (1966) and *Work and Worship Among the Shakers* (1974).¹

Recent scholarly writings on the general history of the society include Priscilla Brewer's *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* and Stephen Stein's *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers*. Brewer concentrates on the

¹Andrews, "Community Industries"; Edward Deming Andrews, *Gift to be Simple: Songs, Dances & Rituals of the American Shakers* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1940); Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*; Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Shaker Furniture* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1937); Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Religion in Wood* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1966); Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*. Stein, and others, consider *The People Called Shakers* a "highly sympathetic" account focusing "almost exclusively on antebellum Believers." Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, p. xiii.

eastern Shaker communities and ends approximately at the opening of the twentieth century. Stein states that his volume is "the first general history of the United Society . . . systematically [covering] the full range of Shaker experience."²

Much scholarly writing in this field addresses how gender played a role in worship or leadership in the society. Shakers, religion, and God were the research topics of Foster, Garrett, Mercadante, Proctor-Smith, and Ruether.³ Campion, Humez, Marini, and Thurman focused on Ann Lee as a religious leader or her image as reflected in the early Shaker testimonies.⁴ Foster and Kern wrote on sex roles and sexuality.⁵

While equality between men and women in the society was espoused by the leadership, whether it existed both spiritually and pragmatically is undecided. A recent

²Brewer, *Shaker Communities*; Stein, *The Shaker Experience*. p. xiii.

³Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family and Utopia: Communal Experiments of Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1991); Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion*; Mercadante, *Gender, Doctrine, & God*; Marjorie Proctor-Smith, *Women in Shaker Community and Worship: A Feminist Analysis of the Uses of Religious Symbolism* (Lewistown, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985); Rosemary Ruether, "Women in Utopian Movements," in Rosemary Ruether and Rosemary Keller, eds., *Women and Religion in America: The Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 46-112.

⁴Nardi Campion, *Mother Ann Lee, Morning Star of the Shakers* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990); Jean Humez, *Mother's First-Born Daughters: Early Shaker Writings on Women and Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Marini, "New View," pp. 47-62, 95-111; Suzanne R. Thurman, *The Order of Nature, the Order of Grace: Community Formation, Female Status, and Relations with the World in the Shaker Villages of Harvard and Shirley, Massachusetts* (Indiana University: unpublished dissertation, 1994).

⁵Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*; Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias -- The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

group of writings by Brewer, Campbell, Crosthwaite, and Kitch debated this issue.⁶ Brewer states that the key issue in this debate is the definition of "equality." Spiritual equality between men and women "stemmed from celibacy, but political and economic equality were problematic. Women shared most positions in the sect with men . . . but authority was gender specific." She concludes her essay by stating that "the feminization of the Society's leadership beginning in the last half of the nineteenth century came about only because of a worsening gender imbalance. The Shakers were never committed to the complete equality of the sexes." Jane Crosthwaite supports Brewer's position but Campbell, Ruether, and Kitch argue that gender equity was achieved by the Shakers.⁷

Sprigg's history of the material culture of the Shakers gives an understanding of how the sect's beliefs in perfection, order, and simplicity were translated into everything they built or made.⁸ Marini's monograph on radical evangelism adds significantly to understanding the attraction of the Shakers to many during the closing years of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century; Whitson's

⁶Priscilla J. Brewer, "'Tho' of the Weaker Sex': A Reassessment of Gender Equality Among the Shakers," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 17, 3, 1992, pp. 609-635; D'Ann Campbell, "Women's Life in Utopia: The Shaker Experiment in Sexual Equality Reappraised, 1810-1860," *New England Quarterly*, 51 (March 1978), pp. 23-38; Jane F. Crosthwaite, "'A White and Seamless Robe': Celibacy and Equality in Shaker Art and Theology," *Colby Library Quarterly*, 25, 3, 1989, pp. 188-198; Sally L. Kitch, *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

⁷Brewer, "'Tho' of the Weaker Sex'," pp. 609-610, 635.

⁸June Sprigg, *By Shaker Hands* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1975); Sprigg, *Shaker Design*; Sprigg and Larson, *Shaker Life*.

compilation of Shaker theological thought is important to understanding the evolution of their religious convictions.⁹

McAleer's recent research examines how sectarian groups are "radical religious expressions" of the larger society's consensual core values. He contends that the Shaker organization was a "radical means of answering the questions raised during the reinterpretation of the culture core by establishing a new paradigm of not only belief and practice, but also of social organization."¹⁰

⁹Marini, *Radical Sects*; Whitson, *Two Centuries of Spiritual Reflection*.

¹⁰Michael James McAleer, *Selected Sectarian Movements and Their Relation to the Culture Core of America* (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary: unpublished dissertation, 1991). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 52, 12 (June 1992), p. 4371-A.

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WRHS The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.
 Andrews Collection The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection,
 Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE.

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